University of Alberta

Mixed Messages: The Métis in Canadian Literature, 1816-2007

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Abstract

The study of contemporary Métis texts is a burgeoning field in Canada today, reflecting the rate at which Métis authors in particular are coming onto the literary scene and using Métis representations to reflect their experiences and worldviews. That development in critical attention is beginning to counterbalance the weight that used to be given to Riel studies, which for decades dominated discussions of Métis history or representations of Métis in Canadian literature. The purpose of this study is to do a broad overview that encompasses not only Riel and the nineteenth-century Métis but also representations of Métis characters other than Riel in Canadian literature by authors of all backgrounds.

The methodology used is a comparative historical and thematic examination of representations of the Métis and *métissage* (the process of racial and cultural mixing) in Canadian texts from the past two centuries in French and English. The nineteenth-century Métis texts that I study in Chapter One reflect a male-oriented Métis national identity that is largely influenced by the Métis' European (French and Catholic) heritage but that necessarily encompasses a definition based on dual racio-cultural heritage.

That definition is maintained by non-Métis authors whose representations of the Métis dominate in Canadian literature after 1885. In Chapters Two and Three, I examine texts by non-Métis authors who convey different types of sympathy or hostility toward métissage and the Métis depending on their own ethnic backgrounds and ideologies. In addition, I discuss a broad shift in ideologies over time as the idea of what it means to be

Canadian moves from "white" normativity in the early twentieth century to multiculturalism in the mid-twentieth century.

In the last two chapters I study texts by Métis authors, who began to gain discursive control over their self-representations in the 1970s. These authors claim a very different Métis identity from that of the nineteenth century, an identity that is now female-oriented and indigenized. More problematically, as I contend in Chapter Five, the history of métissage is being reinterpreted in contemporary Métis literature as imbricated in physical and cultural genocide against First Nations peoples.

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For

Francis Durnin-Vermette

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.......... 1

Critical Background.......... 6

Hybridity Theory.......... 14

Thematic Criticism.......... 34

Structure.......... 40

CHAPTER I – MÉTIS BEGINNINGS: NATIONALITY AND IDENTITY.......... 46

Métis Nationality in Pierre Falcon's "Chanson de la Grenouillère" and Louis Riel's "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest" and "La Métisse".......... 51

Louis Riel and Métis Ethnic Identity.......... 74

Middle Ground and Contact Zone.......... 87

CHAPTER II – MÉTISSAGE AS RACIAL TAINT.......... 98

Nipsya: Métis Liminality.......... 107

Napoléon: Métissage as Tragic Flaw.......... 121

The Gaspards of Pine Croft: Recuperating Métissage.......... 136

CHAPTER III – MÉTISSAGE AS SOCIAL STIGMA.......... 155

Dans le muskeg: Missed Opportunity.......... 162

The Humback: Cultural Amnesia.......... 173

The Diviners: Memory Restored.......... 182

The Scorched-Wood People: History Restored.......... 194

The "Them" and "Us" Conundrum.......... 206

CHAPTER IV – CONSTRUCTING THE NEW MÉTIS IDENTITY 212

Halfbreed: Resignifying Métissage.. 218

The Authenticity Problem 234

Women in the Shadows: Uncovering the History of Métissage 242

Essence vs. Construction in a Métis Context... 253

CHAPTER V – MIXED MESSAGES IN MÉTIS LITERATURE 265

The Impossibility of "Métis" Literature.. 274

Contemporary Métis Images 287

Genocide Discourse and Métissage 302

CONCLUSION.. 324

WORKS CITED 334

INTRODUCTION

Processes of racial and cultural mixing – referred to here as "*métissage,*" but also known as "*mestizaje,*" "miscegenation" or "hybridization" – are found in every colonial and postcolonial society. They arise from the colonial intimacies of interracial sexual relations, marriage, and reproduction, and thus concern sensitive points of colonial gender and race relations often characterized by anxiety, tension, and trauma. In Western Canada, early métissage as part of the fur trade took place in a context of relatively harmonious interaction rather than the violent conquest that characterized much of the Americas. Yet there is little in Canadian literature that reflects that unique history. Instead, images of the Métis or mixedblood characters in literature by non-Métis authors have often been used to write about the subjects these authors were really interested in: white-Indian contact and miscegenation. Even with the recent resurgence of Métis discursive control, literary representations of the Métis often portray Indian-white contact in terms of destructive colonial violence rather than as a potentially productive relationship.

In addition, despite the fact that the Métis as a mixed-race group have been a documented social and cultural reality in Canada for the past two centuries, only recently have critics begun to analyze the Métis as different from the familiar "imaginary Indian." Métis hybridity in Canadian literature has for the most part been examined piecemeal or even camouflaged as analysis of "the Indian," a form of cultural disavowal that parallels the social, political, and economic marginalization that was the norm for Canada's Métis people until the last few decades. The Anglo-Canadian attitude can be summed up in

Margaret Atwood's observation, made in 1972, that in "Margaret Laurence's books, the Indians are represented by the Métis Tonnerre family" (117), a statement that may accurately reflect the general lack of knowledge about the Métis at the time (which was the very point of Laurence's including a Métis family in her books) but that must be permanently laid to rest, along with the notion that delving into "images of the Indian" in any way does justice to images of the Métis in Canadian literature.

The purpose of this study is to avoid the assimilative tendency to see the Métis in literature as a sub-set of "the Indian" or even "Natives" or "Indigenes" and to elucidate with greater clarity and specificity the issues underlying representations of the Métis. My guiding purpose is to add greater depth of historical and cultural context than has hitherto been the general practice in interpreting Métis characters and plots and the overall theme of métissage in Canadian texts. An important part of that contextualization, and the development of a more comprehensive view of Métis representations, is derived from the comparative approach I use in this study. By examining texts produced over the course of two centuries, by Métis and non-Métis authors, in French and English, I aim to create a multi-faceted understanding of the different elements and ideologies that have gone into portraying the Métis within the literary space of Western Canada. This comparative approach is addressed directly at gaining a deeper understanding of how the Métis have seen themselves and have been seen by others within the social space of the west, but indirectly it will show the multifaceted and changing nature of that space in terms of race, culture, language, religion, and ideologies.

At least two major factors complicate the analysis of images of the Métis in Canadian literature, one external and one internal: the first is the influence of American criticism that focuses on the "Indian" and the "mixedblood." While some of this criticism is pertinent to Canadian literature, its wholesale adoption is inappropriate because miscegenation in the United States has historically been equated with the extreme stigmatization of black-white racial mixing. In addition, the genre of "the Western" in American literature and film uses images of the Indian to produce a mythology of American nationality and identity that appears only in very attenuated form, if at all, in Canadian texts.[1] Even current Native critical approaches that privilege hybridity, most notably in the work of Gerald Vizenor, do so in the assumption that mixed blood and cultural duality are characteristics of all Native people today and are therefore fundamental to all Native writing. When applied to Canadian literature, such assumptions contribute to the continued suppression of Métis specificity, even (or perhaps above all) when Métis texts are idealized as the epitome of contemporary Native consciousness.

The other major complicating factor is the dual (French and English) European heritage that is a historical fact of Western Canada, something that is often forgotten by Anglo-Canadian critics but that is central to the history and image of the Métis. Mixedblood characters often appear in early English-Canadian literature as villainous Indigenous "Others," but their villainy may derive as much from their French ancestry as from their Indian background. Conversely, Francophone writers from Western Canada tend to create sympathetic Métis characters out of a sense of shared history and a shared experience of marginalization. In the literature of Western Canada, then, the longstanding animosity between Anglo-Canadians and Franco-Canadians is sometimes played out in narratives about the Métis.[2] Even where this animosity is not overtly thematized in the text, the centrality of the French fact in Western Canada – as seen in language, religion, and other cultural features – must be taken into account as part of Métis identity, or where those features have been lost, as a part of the Métis experience of assimilation.

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[1] See Armando José Prats, *Invisible Natives*, for an excellent discussion of how the Indian is mythologized to form American identity through the genre of the Western in film.

The main exception to the relative absence of Métis specificity in English-Canadian literary criticism is the field of Riel studies. Because he is *the* major Métis figure in Canadian history and a positive (or at the very least the most fascinatingly complicated) icon for most contemporary Canadians, Louis Riel dominates the picture of Métis literature (or literature about the Métis). Since there is no reason to believe that the Riel industry will collapse any time soon, it is safe to say that this branch of Métis studies will thrive far into the future. Albert Braz's monograph, *The False Traitor* (2003), gives a thorough analysis of all the dimensions of this body of literature. For that reason, Riel necessarily appears in this study as author, literary character, and a central figure of Métis historical memory, but he represents only one aspect of Métis consciousness, and one that is increasingly downplayed, as I discuss in Chapters Four and Five. Most of the characters I examine here are more 'ordinary' Métis figures in settings that range from the early nineteenth century to the present day in Canada.

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[2] This ideological contrast stands out starkly in comparisons of texts about Louis Riel (see Klooss and especially Braz).

In elaborating on the literary working-out of thematic Métis hybridity and its textual and discursive effects, I focus on Métis characters and the narratives they fit into. Though this sort of approach depends on a mimetic understanding of Métis characters and their lives, I draw a distinction between the material reality of Métis people and the ways in which that reality is imagined and depicted mimetically. What I wish to discover and analyze is this: when a character is marked as Métis or racially hybrid, in what terms is that attribute understood by the author and what consequences does that attribute have for the character's actions and the progression of the plot? This analysis of character and plot then serves as the basis for a reading of the themes(s) in the narrative that revolve around hybridity and its effects, which in turn are illuminated by the author's ideology or the reigning conventions and cultural codes of the historical period in which the text was produced.

I use the capitalized form "Métis" to refer particularly to Métis people who trace their ancestry to the fur trade in Western Canada (known as Rupert's Land until 1869-70 when the Hudson's Bay Company sold the territory to the Dominion of Canada). Originally, the French term designated mixedblood people of French-Canadian and (usually) Cree or Ojibwe heritage, while people whose ancestry was (usually) Scots or English were called "Halfbreeds." That term fell out of usage in the mid-twentieth century because of its derogatory connotations, and the French "Métis" (often spelled without an accent) was adopted to cover both groups. Currently, the uncapitalized "métis" is commonly used to designate people of mixed Indian and Euro-Canadian descent who do not identify with any of the historically recognized Métis communities. My study focuses on the Métis who trace their ancestry to contact dating back to the fur trade (roughly, from the mid-eighteenth century when La Vérendrye moved into what is now north-western Canada). Nevertheless, much of my discussion of Métis hybridity is also relevant to métis people.

Critical Background

In the 1970s and 80s, Canadian literary critics began to pay sustained attention to the treatment of Native peoples in Canadian texts but often failed to distinguish the Métis from "the Indian,"[3] so that a body of scholarship grew up dedicated to dissecting "images of the Indian" without formulating critical concepts or arguments that might elucidate representations of mixedblood people, let alone the Métis as a group with a distinct identity. Leslie Monkman's excellent study of "images of the Indian" in English-Canadian literature, for example, includes a section on Margaret Laurence's and Rudy Wiebe's Métis characters without distinguishing them as anything other than a sub-set of "the Indian" (57-63; 124-26).

Things have begun to change thanks to increased scholarship on hybridity as a global phenomenon and the recognition that hybridity is central to postcolonial concerns. As Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin point out, "The postcolonial imagination depends on the mixing of cultures. Its interest lies in the characters who embody that process in their lives" (132). Yet they immediately discount Métis content from playing any significant part in writing by non-Native authors, "since non-Métis writers can only write of Métis culture from outside that culture." Instead, suggest these authors, the non-Native artist inhabits the third space of hybridity by becoming a "mulatto of style" (an expression borrowed from Derek Walcott) to make "'creative use' of this cultural schizophrenia" (132). My contention is that the Métis content in Canadian texts, whether authored by Métis or non-Métis authors, has much to tell us about the complexities of Canadian colonialism. One aspect of that colonial mentality is precisely the wilful exclusion of the Métis "third space" in favour of an insistence on the Euro-Canadian/Indian encounter as *the* ideal, authentic key to Canadian self-knowledge.[4]

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[3] The term "Indian" is used here to make a distinction within the designations "Native" or "Aboriginal" between Métis and non-Métis people. The term "First Nations" is used in a political context to make this distinction, but in literary criticism the idea of "the Indian" has long been used to signify both the natives of North America and the stereotypes that grew up around them in textual representations (see, for example, Monkman and Francis in English-Canadian and Therrien in French-Canadian criticism, and Berkhofer in American criticism).

The broader designation of "indigene" that Terry Goldie uses in his influential study of Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literatures offers the promise of a more nuanced treatment of mixedblood or hybrid Natives. That promise, though, is not realized. Goldie argues that the image of the indigene is a "reified preservation" in the literatures under study owing to a semiotic process in which "[e]ach representation of the indigene is a signifier for which the signified is the Image. The referent has little purpose in the equation" (*Fear* 4). According to this theory, representations of Native people in

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[4] This exclusion of the physical mixedblood as a significant middle term in racial-cultural contact is reminiscent of the creation in early American literature of what Brian Hubner calls the "spiritual mixed-blood" (62). In characters such as James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo (aka "Hawkeye"), the white woodsman takes on attributes of the Indian in order to defeat him. Through spiritual (and to some extent material) hybridization, the spritual mixedblood becomes the ideal American while the physical mixedblood is abjectified or ignored.

Canadian literature function like representations of “the Oriental” in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as a monologic, monolithic discourse in which the flesh-and-blood, historical Native has no impact. Moreover, asserts Goldie, this process takes place regardless of the writer's intentions. For that reason, even writers who attempt to portray Natives "positively" cannot help but enter into this inexorable semiotic process.

For Goldie, the only significant effect of history has been that Europeans conquered the Indigenous peoples of North America and "oppression awarded semiotic control to the invaders" (5), setting in motion the semiosis that has been at work ever since. Goldie uses the term "indigenization" to describe the process whereby white invader-settlers use that semiotic control to attempt to become "native" to the land they have moved to. He sets out a number of "standard commodities" that make up the semiotic field of the indigene: "sex, violence, orality, mysticism, the prehistoric" (17). By insisting that these restricted, essential terms constitute the entirety of the semiotic field of the indigene, the critic eliminates from the outset any of the terms that might open the discussion to questions of hybridity.

The relationship between Western Francophones and the Métis has been nearly as complex historically as that between Anglophones and the Métis. While the period after 1870-1885 was characterized more by sympathy than acute hostility (as was the case with Anglo-Canadians), that sympathy was based on a recognition of the Métis as fellow Catholic French speakers facing the onslaught of Anglicization and minorization, but their indigenous background still made them the objects of racist taunts from non-Métis Francophones (Hallion Bres 165). Given the greater awareness by Western Francophones of the Métis as a distinct indigenous group (undoubtedly because that difference derived mainly from the French side of the Métis), criticism in French has generally been more historically and culturally precise than English criticism. Indeed, the vast majority of French criticism on Native themes as a whole, as evidenced most notably in the pages of the *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest* (published since 1989 by the Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest in Winnipeg) and *Francophonies d'Amérique* (published since 1991 by the Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa), has dealt with Métis rather than First Nations representations.

The latest chapter in the ongoing battle of representations opens with the development of Native literature and an attendant Native critical perspective. Picking up from the point where Euro-Canadians demolished the myth of the "noble savage" and the stereotyped image of the Indian, Native writers and critics have stepped in to assert that "real" Natives do indeed have something to do with the imaginary Indian, precisely because that image affects their lives in real, material ways. As Jonathan Hart points out, from the very first representation of the "Indians" produced by Columbus in the fifteenth century, "The image of the Native seems to have preceded the Native, and the Natives soon suffered when they didn't comply to the image and when they did. The image could degrade them as much as idealize them: the price the Natives paid for this 'imaging' and 'imagining' was material. The Europeans made them into texts the Europeans alone could interpret, and often with ready-made interpretations" (71-72). The current insistence on Native "voice" as a means of resistance is understandable after five centuries of European discursive hegemony in the Americas with the material effects that accompanied that hegemony.

Margery Fee has argued that Métis who choose to adopt a general "Native" identity rather than a specifically Métis one do so as a means of gaining political power and dismantling the ideas of "race" and even "ethnicity" that have maintained the stereotyping process. For Fee, "the move away from concepts of ethnic diversity and authenticity to Aboriginal pan-ethnic nationalism is a move toward greater equality for the First Peoples because it allows more freedom from the constraints of a stereotyped category" ("What Use" 690). As I discuss in Chapter Five, however, the emphasis on concerted resistance from the Native community has meant that the Métis are conflated with other Natives in North and South America as having suffered a history of conquest, oppression, and genocide, a conflation that falsifies the actual history of fur trade métissage.

What is more, the idea of race is now being recuperated by members of racialized minorities themselves who find that it is indispensable for discussing certain realities that simple cultural differences cannot explain. As Leo Driedger puts it, "if something is defined by people as real – as race has been for decades – it is real in its consequences" (214). The problem of Métis mixed race is that its "consequences" have been even more contested and contingent than the idea of race itself. Early Métis identity was defined as much by the father's nationality as it was by aboriginality: the naming of "Métis" and "Halfbreed" is indicative of that fact. The Euro-Canadian paternal influence that helped define the Métis in the early years has more recently been discarded in favour of the

Aboriginal maternal influence: Métis writer Emma LaRocque names herself "Cree-Métis" ("Native Writers" 62) to signal an attachment to her Aboriginal roots that for the nineteenth-century Métis was understood but not underscored in such a manner.

In myriad small ways, the contemporary "rebirth" of Métis identity is in fact a reconstruction: it could not be otherwise, when the society and cultural matrix in which that identity is being asserted has changed so fundamentally. It is fallacious, therefore, to suggest that this new constructed identity merely amounts to a "correction" of misconceptions purveyed by a hostile and oppressive white society. The "mixed messages" about Métisness that circulate in the Canadian literary space are the product of Métis, First Nations, and white authors alike: no one group possesses the final "truth" about the meanings of métissage. At this point, there can be no question of "unmixing" the messages and placing the genie of métissage back in the bottle. All we can hope for is to gain some clarity about the ideologies underlying those messages and the implications hidden within them.

In effect, both the European romanticizing of the "noble (pre-contact) savage" and the Native focus on contact as genocide are indictments of the very existence of the Métis as a product of the contact between Indian peoples and Europeans. If contact is to be viewed as a moment of desecration and fall from Aboriginal purity, then the Métis become the embodiment of that fall, a people fatally contaminated by the whiteness that they cannot entirely expunge without disavowing the biracial underpinnings of their own identity. When white ancestry was ascendant, the Métis were seen as fatally flawed by their Indian heritage; now that the positions have been reversed and Indian heritage is valued more highly, the white component of the Métis has in turn become suspect. The desire to dissect the famous binary stereotype of the "noble savage" in order to discover precisely what constitutes nobility and what constitutes savagery for the European or Euro-Canadian writer or filmmaker leaves no room for analysis of how those agents of European culture perceived or imagined the mixed-race Métis, how the Métis imagined themselves, and how the eddies and flows of those imaginings have impinged on one another over the years.

The point here is that political incorrectness and political correctness alike can lead to a rigidification in literary studies and a refusal to address contradictory evidence or examples that simply do not fit into the proposed framework. As Jack Healy points out, "All empires are not [...] one empire at last; all Indians are not one Indian at last; all deaths are not, in an important way, one Death at last. [...] The poverty of poor theory locked too rigidly into the blindness of one epistemological and heavily institutionalized moment may be the real postcolonial culprit" (103). The single-minded critical focus on stereotypes of the non-existent "Indian" (which continues today in texts such as Groening's or in the collection by Ute Lischke and David McNab on Aboriginal representations) tends merely to reproduce the stereotype that is purportedly being deconstructed.

In contrast with all three critical perspectives outlined above (English, French, and Native), the approach I take here is more broadly comparative and more historically informed than most. Because I focus on the Western Métis as a unique Aboriginal group, English critical approaches that deal with "Indian" images are not adequate to frame the question of métissage or the Métis in a focused manner. This often results in rather skewed treatments of Métis themes, as I discuss further in Chapter Three. Comparative work on Métis themes has been done by Fitz (using French and English texts by non-Métis authors) and Sing (who uses French, English, and Native texts to discuss a variety of sub-themes in writing by and about the Métis), as well as Kaup (who adopts a pan-American framework to compare Campbell and Anzaldúa).[5]

The only text that deals specifically with the Métis on the same historical scale I adopt here (but with a much larger corpus of texts covered) is Braz's study of Louis Riel in Canadian culture. While I have aimed for similar historical specificity, my focus is on representations of the Métis that do not focus on Riel, but on more "ordinary" Métis, and on attitudes toward métissage. Certainly, I could not leave Riel out of the picture entirely, since he remains a central Métis figure. Furthermore, as the first Métis intellectual who left an enormous body of writings about his people, Riel offers insights into the self-definition of the Métis that provide an anchor in the nineteenth century against which to compare more recent constructions of Métis identity. To create a multi-faceted comparative study of Métis representations that covers writing from both "inside" and "outside," and a study that examines changes in ideology over time, I include texts by Métis, First Nations, French, and English authors arranged chronologically. This arrangement also parallels discursive power and the linguistic shift in the West, where the Métis voice that is so prominent before 1885 is replaced by the English and French voices of the white majority and minority. Métis voices reappear in Canadian literature again in the 1970s, as a consequence of the Red Power movement in general and of growing Métis political activism in particular, but now in English rather than French. My critical approach is best described as comparative thematics. Before discussing thematics, however, I will make an excursus into the field of hybridity theory, to explain why I have chosen not to adopt this theory wholesale.

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[5] Amaryll Chanady also adopts an Americas-wide perspective in her study of the symbols of 'otherness.'

Hybridity Theory

One potential alternative to interpreting Métis representations and narratives is offered by the burgeoning field of hybridity theory, which would seem well suited to elucidate the nature and positioning of the Métis by avoiding old binaries. Indeed, Armando Janetta has applied a form of hybridity theory (or what he calls "nomadology" (73) to Métis texts in one of the only published monographs on Métis literature. Jannetta emphasizes the "dialogism and difference" of those texts, identifying such features as "hybrid discourse" (9) and racial, linguistic and political "border-jumping" (14) or the ability to "move between multiple identities" (112) as unique characteristics of Métis people and writing, yet the terms in which he describes these literary techniques become so inclusive as to lose all critical purchase in the end. Hybridity theory does offer some useful concepts, but those concepts must be used with careful attention to historical, geographical, and cultural detail.

Over the past three decades, there has been an explosion of new work and theory on mixed-race people in postcolonial and cultural studies, Mestizo/a studies in Latin

America and Chicano/a studies in the United States, and in globalization studies, as well as in various corners of history and literary or film studies. Indicative of this rapid development of theory and empirical study is the current ubiquity of the term "hybridity" and related or synonymous terms in a vast array of academic fields and areas of specialization.[6] Hybridity has also become the subject of intense debate, the ubiquity of the term itself serving as a basis for cogent and powerful arguments against it: if all manner of individual and collective identities and cultural forms can be heaped pell-mell under the rubric of "hybridity," then presumably any analytical power it may once have had is fatally diluted.[7]

"Hybridity" (sometimes specified as racial hybridity to distinguish it from cultural hybridity) refers to intermarriage between people from different races and the production of mixed-race offspring, one of the processes of contact that take place in a "contact zone" or "middle ground"[8] and give rise to mixed forms of material and ideological culture. Although racial hybridity is the norm rather than the exception in human history, the high value attached over the past two centuries to pure origins, nationalities, and cultures has meant that until recently, hybridity has generally (though not universally) been devalued. As a result, hybrid people such as Canada's Métis have come under pressure to become "normal" by assimilating into one of the recognized groups in Canadian society – to become either "white" or "Indian."

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[6] May Joseph lists no fewer than twenty concepts of hybridity used by authors writing on cultural studies, globalization and its local effects, and literary and performance techniques: "Homi Bhabha's 'mimicry,' Kobena Mercer's 'creolizing practices,' Stuart Hall's 'new ethnicities,' Paul Gilroy's 'syncretism,' Manthia Diawara's 'Afro-kitsch,' Edouard Glissant's 'transversality,' Marlene Nourbese Philip's 'babu english,' Roberto Fernández Retamar's 'Caliban,' Antonio Benítez-Rojo's 'super-syncretism,' Assia Djebar's 'nomad memory,' Arjun Appadurai's 'global ethnoscapes,' Lisa Lowe's 'heterogeneity,' José Martí's 'Our America,' Nicolás Guillén's and Françoise Lionnet's uses of *métissage*, Néstor García Canclini's 'cultural reconversion,' Celeste Olalquiaga's 'Tupinicopolitan aesthetic,' Robert Stam's 'carnivalesque,' and Michelle Cliff's 'ruination,' to name a few." (10). This proliferation of terms is testament to the universality of hybridity as a social and cultural phenomenon *and* to the fact that it appears in distinct forms depending on such variables as history, geography, politics, the circumstances of cultural mixing and local or individual aesthetics.

[7] Jan Nederveen Pieterse has made an effort to produce an overview of the field and to suggest a structure of categorizations and continuums to clarify major trends in thinking about hybridity. Given the current geopolitical climate with its penchant for binary analysis (for example, the "clash of civilizations" theory of current world affairs), it is safe to say that despite growing recognition of the need for hybrid thinking (or *logiques métisses*, in Jean-Loup Amselle's phrase), its future prevalence is by no means assured.

Hybridity, and especially racial hybridity, is a particularly fraught and potent subject that taps into powerful attitudes mainly, as Laura Ann Stoler has shown, because it involves bodies and reproduction (both physical and ideological) in a setting of sexual and domestic intimacy within colonial regimes. In that context, the reproduction of metropolitan values at the colonial margins is threatened when physical reproduction produces colonial bodies that are Other, and thus a synecdoche for the whole world of otherness that colonialism is meant to eradicate. This colonial psychology is what Robert Young calls "colonial desire": "a covert but insistent obsession with transgressive, inter-racial sex, hybridity and miscegenation" (xii).

Theories of hybridity, mainly developed in postcolonial and globalization studies, posit that when two racially and culturally diverse groups come together as a result of exploration or colonial contact, the processes that unfold between them change both groups materially, culturally, and ideologically. Much of the work within these fields focuses on how to characterize and describe those processes and changes either in specific cases or as a general phenomenon. In his overview of the various disciplines that use notions of hybridity (and that have recently begun to witness an "anti-hybridity backlash"), Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes that "Hybridity carries different meanings in different cultures, among different circles within cultures and at different periods" so that, for example, "'mixed race' carries meaning only where 'race' counts" (106). Given the huge variety of cultural and material circumstances that have resulted in various forms of hybridity, it is difficult to fashion a theory that fits every culture and every historical situation. Indeed, theorists such as Abdul JanMohamed argue that colonial regimes should properly be understood as regimes based on a Manichean paradigm rather than hybridity.

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[8] This term is from Mary Louise Pratt; Patrick Colm Hogan uses "zone of contact" to refer specifically to cities as areas in which people come together and myriad processes of hybridity unfold. I will use Richard White's term "middle ground" to refer to the Western Canadian contact zone for reasons that are explained in Chapter One.

The Manichean view of colonial literature is familiar to Canadian readers: it has been used in analyzing literary portrayals of the white colonizer as "good" (civilized, progressive, powerful, temperate, a worthy conqueror) and the Indian as "evil" ("Other," savage, backward, weak, intemperate, an unworthy foe). JanMohamed argues that "the colonizer's invariable assumption about his moral superiority means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society's formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized" (18). Consequently, the texts produced by colonizers are never really about the Other at all, but are merely a means of reinforcing their cultural narcissism: "Such literature is essentially specular: instead of seeing the native as a bridge toward syncretic possibility, it uses him as a mirror that reflects the colonialist's self-image" (19). The only escape from this reflex, says JanMohamed, is for an author to focus reflexively on "the 'imaginary' mechanism of colonialist mentality" (20) rather than on the mimetic effort of representation itself, which is doomed to fail.

To some, this clear-cut Manichean paradigm is the most appropriate means of describing colonialism, with its foundation of asymmetrical power, violence, and exploitation, and certainly for describing the ideology that serves to justify colonialism. Hybridity theory arose, however, out of a conviction that a system based on binary oppositions could not capture the complexities of colonial dynamics. A major criticism of the sort of monolithic discursive formation described by Said in *Orientalism*, for example, is that it fails to leave any room for agency or resistance on the part of the colonized Other (Loomba 48-51).

As developed most visibly by Homi Bhabha, postcolonial hybridity theory is based on observations of ways in which the colonized, while mimicking the structures and discourses of the colonizer, introduces subtle differences to those structures and discourses in order to resist, destabilize, and undermine them. The colonizer, in turn, is unsettled by a colonized subject who, instead of appearing radically Other (and thus easily discounted and dominated), is now "*almost the same but not quite*" (89, emphasis in original).[9]

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[9] Patrick Colm Hogan thoroughly critiques Bhabha's approach, concluding that it does not in fact constitute "theory" at all (24-43).

Though it is partially based on a development of ideas about colonial psychology first identified by Frantz Fanon, Bhabha's theory identifies linguistic and textual forms of hybridity as crucial to resistance. For Bhabha, colonial hybridity arises at the moment of enunciation, that is, simultaneously with the act that initiates colonial reproduction. The colonizer's belief and intention is that the word or text will convey the presence (and hence the superiority) of the European colonizer's culture, but a discourse based on "discrimination," far from relying on an absolute difference between self and Other, actually produces a splitting of the signifier, "where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid" (*Location* 111). This operation gives rise to "the mixed and split texts of hybridity" (113) whose subversion is "founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (112).

The effect of colonial ambivalence and hybridity, then, is to lay open the colonial regime to resistance by the colonized subject. Colonial repetition-with-a-difference opens a breach in what is meant to be a monolithic colonial regime – or rather, it opens so many breaches that the regime becomes thoroughly porous. That porosity is what allows for colonial resistance, especially in the form of cultural responses if, as Bhabha contends, "[f]orms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional *cultural* practices" (20). The colonial disavowal of indigenous knowledge is reversed, "so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition" (114). The undecidability of the signifier in colonial discourse denies it the referential function that is meant to constitute colonial authority. The decentring of colonial binaries transforms the (psychological and discursive) contact zone by opening up what Bhabha calls a "third space," a "productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness" ("Third Space" 209). This is a liminal space in which cultural difference and even cultural incommensurability lead to new forms of negotiation.

A number of critics have pointed out weaknesses in Bhabha's theory, most notable among them Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry, on the grounds that his emphasis on psychology and language disregards central questions of the material aspects and effects of colonialism. One major question is whether Bhabha's ideas offer the colonized subject any real agency: if hybridity is an inevitable effect of (colonial) cultural contact, and if the colonized always absorbs and shifts colonial meanings to align them with Indigenous culture, is any form of intentional resistance involved? The critic does seem to anticipate these objections, suggesting that there is a natural progression from defensive discursive disruption to aggressive counter-discourse: "To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity – the warlike, subaltern sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain" (*Location* 121). Yet in terms of individual psychology, Antony Easthope points out that Bhabha cannot escape a binary construction whose terms are "either full identity or no identity at all, only difference" (345). For Easthope, a position of permanent difference in identity is simply untenable, "for what is being recommended is only too like the state of psychosis" (345). In the interests of psychic self-preservation, the subject always ends up constructing a coherent position from which to speak (failing which, presumably, the subject remains voiceless). Easthope's observation helps explain why Métis hybridity is often construed as something like a "state of psychosis" and why Métis writers might seek a coherent position by expressing Native solidarity rather than by attempting to inhabit an uncomfortable and misunderstood hybridity.

A more general problem with the postcolonial approach to hybridity is its tendency to conflate the colonial context with the effects of contact itself – that is, to see all cultural counterflows as resistance rather than as naturally occurring processes of cultural mixing. Some of the primary concerns of postcolonialism are questions of power, hierarchies, and resistance. The very term "colonialism" (and even more so "imperialism") implies exploitation, oppression, and violence (physical, linguistic, and cultural), and the omnipresent hierarchy of colonizer/colonized. The connotations of the term "colonial" themselves disallow any positive meanings of hybridity as a cultural process involving exchange, enrichment, openness to others, and an understanding of identity as relational rather than essential. At best, they offer an agonistic relationship in which productivity is always fraught with doubts about whether it signifies agency or submission.

With a focus on social, economic, and cultural processes that characterize modernity (mainly, the accelerated movement of goods, capital, people, and information), globalization studies provide a less abstract view of hybridity than Bhabha's postcolonialism. In this view of the world, forms of mixing or métissage in cultural, social, and linguistic forms are the norm rather than the exception. Anthropology, which from the early twentieth century had set itself the ideal of seeking out and describing “authentic” cultures untouched by European contact, has also recently embraced cultural hybridity as a valid object of study rather than a taint to be carefully avoided (Amselle 25-42; Audinet 7-20).

As Annie Coombes and Avtar Brah note in the introduction to their anthology on hybridity, this recent embracing of hybridity as a value in itself and a natural outcome of contact threatens to erase the histories of violence that often do lie behind racial and cultural mixing, so that "At times it has resulted in an uncritical celebration of the traces of cultural syncretism which assumes a symbiotic relationship without paying adequate attention to economic, political and social inequalities" (1). At the other extreme lie usages of the term that play on its etymology as a biological term denoting the infertile crossing of species. Here, the value of hybridity lies in its (ahistorical) use as a trope or form that is inherently unsettling to conservative tendencies, in that “‘hybridity’ signals the threat of 'contamination' to those who espouse an essentialist notion of pure and authentic origins.” The danger, say Coombes and Brah, is that “This lends the term a potentially transgressive power which might seem to endorse the celebration of its traces as transgressive *per se*" (1), regardless of the pain that might also be tied up with those traces. Historically, for example, the “transgressive power” of racially hybrid people has not usually translated into social or personal power for them. Instead, it has made them objects of suspicion and marginalization.

The problem, as Ella Shohat points out, is that "A celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence (109). The figure of the cosmopolitan that has become the hybrid figure *par excellence* in globalization theory, for example, takes for granted the sort of mobility free of economic or political anxiety that derives from privilege and therefore potentially from an unexamined oppression of the less-privileged.

As a pragmatic solution to organizing the contradictions, Nederveen Pieterse proposes that a "continuum of hybridities" be established with "on one end, an assimilationist hybridity that leans over toward the center, adopts the canon and mimics hegemony and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the center" (74). Discerning the particular brand of hybridity at work in a given situation requires not only a broad cultural focus, but also attention to the underlying politics of hybridization, taking into account "the *terms* of mixture, the conditions of mixing" (74) and the history of mixing.

Recent writing on hybridity further highlights a post-structuralist understanding of identity, for example in the imaginative explorations of such writers as Gloria Anzaldúa, Gerald Vizenor, and Fred Wah. By performing hybridity even as she explores it, Anzaldúa concretizes many of the contradictions and aporias of hybridity that are not amenable to explanation through expository presentation alone. She reveals a fragmented and shifting self, a self determined by the different subject positions that she occupies in different social contexts or at different stages of life, or more ominously by the various discursive formations or interpellations to which the individual is subjected.

According to Anzaldúa, she is determined to delve into the contradictions and hidden pleasures of hybridity because "Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (87). Her determination to take full stock of her situation as a hybrid person suggests that, as Anthony Easthope says, the individual always strives in some way to suture together the various fragments of the self into a semblance of coherence. With her "new mestiza" consciousness, Anzaldúa manages to attain what Easthope suggests is an impossible fantasy in a context of hybridity, "the mastery of a subject [who is] supposed to know, who can remain sure of themselves even when confronted with the appearance of hybridity on all sides – in culture, in their own subjectivity" (347). She appears to do so by internalizing hybridity as a subject position, and hence the appearance of hybridity on all sides becomes a positive force for self-recognition rather than a reason for the denial of part of the self (a denial that is often impossible and can be damaging for racially marked individuals in particular). While Anzaldúa's tone is defiant and celebratory, it nevertheless demonstrates the psychological toll on the individual who is determined to take a liminal stance. She notes, for example, that "The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness" (78). Embracing liminality might offer individuals creative freedom or room in which to take up positions outside recognized categories and authoritative discourses, but it is unclear whether such values and strategies can sustain a collective identity.

Clearly, the best-known forms of current hybridity theory do not fully address the particular context of Métis hybridity in Canada, with its long timeline and shifting status. The history of Métis representations in Canada shows that authors and the narratives they create around their Métis characters use both the mixedness of hybridity *and* the binary of a Manichean allegory, depending on the author's ideology as well as the cultural codes and literary conventions in place at the time of writing. In a Manichean narrative structure, Métis characters may be temporarily useful to the (white) protagonist, but ultimately turn out to be "evil," sometimes after a battle with the "good" white part of their natures. To some authors, racial hybridity represents its own especially vile form of degeneracy. Sympathetic portraits of Métis characters, in contrast, sometimes cast them as victims of domination by Anglo-Canadians or Central Canada (for example, when the author identifies with them as fellow Francophone Catholics or Western Canadians) or may focus on the particular effects of hybridity on Métis individuals and communities in a pointed rejection of Manichean fiction.

Despite the threat of collapse through overuse, the term "hybridity" (or "métissage") still has sufficient explanatory power to sustain at least part of the hermeneutical burden I propose to place upon it. It should be remembered that métissage involves both the *process* of racial mixing or miscegenation in Canada (where intermarriage between Indian women and Euro-Canadian men in the fur trade gave rise to descendants now known collectively as the Métis) and the condition of *being* racially and culturally mixed and its effects on individuals and communities. I use the word "métissage" to refer to both process and result, as a discursively appropriate way of discussing the context of Métis representations.

In addition, it is useful to think of the attributes of the Métis as "effects" of métissage rather than as unchanging, essential features. The main effects of hybridity for Métis as individuals and groups are liminality, ambiguity, and mobility. Because the Métis are often considered in terms of sociocultural or racial "in-betweenness" (or liminality), because their cultural features sometimes result from an overlap between Aboriginal and European practices that results in a perceived ambiguity of Métis utterances and practices, and because the Métis are characterized by their ability to move between groups, cultures, languages, and lifestyles, they form a particularly fluid group whose very fluidity is sometimes perceived by outsiders as, alternatively, either threatening or a sign of weakness. When a society rejects or discounts métissage (as has been the case for much of Canadian history), each of these aspects is met with an interpretation that evacuates the doubleness of the hybrid: liminality is countered by a binaristic "two-worlds" interpretation of Canadian culture; ambiguity is interpreted as disloyalty or alienation; and mobility is seen as an abnormal lack of rootedness. In literary texts, these effects and the responses to them also translate into the themes and narrative forms I discuss.

Liminality

As first articulated by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 and later broadened by Victor Turner, the notion of liminality as a "threshold" status (from the

Latin *limen*, or threshold) is applied to any activity in which people exist for an extended period in an in-between state, whether physically, socially, or spiritually. In a state of liminality (as for example during a pilgrimage), social boundaries are eased and levelling occurs as the hierarchies that would usually separate classes of people cease to operate.

Turner's description of liminal spaces and people in a state of existential liminality applies to mixed-race people in many ways and more specifically to the Métis in the Northwestern fur trade: "The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (*Forest* 95). In a culture that recognizes "white" and "Indian" as racial categories, the mixed-race person who refuses to assimilate into either and who insists on the recognition of both ancestries becomes liminal as long as the system of "two worlds" (white and Indian) is maintained. The idea that there are "white" and "Native" worlds defined by different – even incommensurable – epistemologies is an enduring one.

The liminality of Métis people may appear in a number of forms. In the fur trade, it allowed the Métis to develop a special function as go-betweens: trading middlemen, interpreters, guides, and experts in transport moving goods across the prairie. Liminality and mobility go hand in hand when the liminal individual's knowledge about geography and territories, and his familiarity with languages, cultural forms, and inter-group relations enables him to move through physical and social areas that would be closed to members of other groups. Métis critics today invoke a similar quality when they refer to an ability to "talk across difference" gained from living with "the inner tension of negotiating at least two worlds" (Leclair, "Métis Wisdom" 126, 123).

Liminality can thus be useful in social situations where ease of boundary-crossing and fluid relations are valued. Yet it can quickly turn into powerlessness when social structures rigidify and greater value is attached to establishing and policing boundaries. That is what happened in the late nineteenth century with the consolidation of central power over Western Canada and the move to restrict Indian bands to reserves so that the land could be given over to white settlement. The Métis were not recognized as a separate aboriginal group, and their liminality then became a liability as the government insisted that they must move into one of the two defined groups. As Prime Minister John A. Macdonald stated to the House of Commons in 1885, "If they are Indians, they go with the tribe. If they are half-breeds, they are whites, and they stand in exactly the same relation to the Hudson's Bay and Canada as if they were altogether white" (qtd. in Morrison 41).

This treatment of the Métis shows that liminality can be useful to society at large in certain situations and can thus confer benefits on the liminal person or group, but it always remains a tenuous and dangerous position: the very ambiguity and mobility of the liminal person, the qualities that make him useful in certain situations, also mean that he can be perceived as dangerous because of his anomalous position. Mary Douglas points out that it is human nature "to long for hard lines and clear concepts," but "when we have them we have to either face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts" (200). Ideas about racial difference and a strict separation between the worlds of Indians and whites are the "clear concepts" that the Métis have challenged ever since they began to assert their own realities as something to be reckoned with in the formation of a national space.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity – defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "uncertainty" or a "wavering of opinion" in the subjective sense and "capability of being understood in two or more ways; double or dubious signification" when used objectively – is a function of the hybrid's cultural liminality. Anzaldúa notes that the mestiza "copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (79).

Ambiguity is related to the term "ambivalence" that is central to Bhabha's definition of postcolonial hybridity as a sign of the splitting of the colonial self, but ambiguity might be the more powerful term in that it shifts the undecidability of hybridity away from the hybrid individual and onto the perceptions of others. The métis individual need not be interpreted as inherently divided, confused, or even ambivalent; the confusion comes from the perceiver who reads hybrid ambiguity (being *both* this *and* that) normatively as dividedness or confusion. If the hybrid subject learns to tolerate ambiguity, then it is disturbing only to those who expect meaning and identity to be unified and bounded within well-defined categories. The ambiguity of hybridity may be interpreted normatively by the non-hybrid as a sign of "divided loyalties" or dangerous mobility.

Métis literature may also possess a special quality of double-voiced discourse that fits William Empson's definition of ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (1). The difference for a Métis utterance is that the ambiguity is not necessarily strictly semantic, but may arise from its belonging to two different cultural systems simultaneously. This aspect of Métis literary form is discussed in detail by Armando Jannetta as a process of mixing genres, or "border-crossing" (which he relates to the Métis historical custom of "boundary-crossing" once the international border between Canada and the United States was established (13). Paradoxically, all forms of boundary-crossing depend on the ceaseless operation of the social, political or cultural forces working to define and maintain conventions and categories. In effect, acts of transgression depend for their potency on the very authorities who maintain the boundaries to be crossed. This is not to contend, however, that every ambiguity in a Métis context amounts to a willed transgression. Instead, the inherent cultural hybridity of the Métis may make such ambiguity or double meaning a natural part of Métis cultural production. As Warren Cariou puts it,

> Métis stories are something like the Rigoureau, the shape-changing wolf-man character which often appears in those stories. The Rigoureau is an amalgam of European werewolf legendry and Oji-Cree shape-changer narratives, and perhaps because of this it is a creature of liminality, a dangerous passe-partout, a trickster, a traitor, a folk hero, an outsider. In

> other words, it is the perfect metaphor for the slipperiness of Métis identity itself." ("We Use" 193)

As with specific instances of discursive ambiguity, the impact of Métis cultural ambiguity depends on maintaining the doubleness, even as the details of each separate meaning may be teased out and examined. The richness of such ambiguity lies in its ability to mobilize and play upon areas of overlap between European and Indigenous cultures.

Mobility

Like ambiguity, the mobility of hybrid people is a function of their liminality and is subject to both positive and negative interpretations. The liminal space or "middle ground" of the fur trade is one in which Indian and Euro-Canadian people mingled to produce a mutually comprehensible world outside of the colonial power structures already established in the eastern part of the country. In this space, intermarriage between the two groups conferred social mobility on the Euro-Canadian traders and facilitated trading partnerships by establishing all-important kinship relations. The mixed-race children of these unions were born into hybrid liminality and inhabited it as the only space they had ever known.

Métis mobility was thus crucial to the fur trade, but with the colonization of the west and the switch from a mercantile to an agricultural economy, the colonial regime might have been expected to attempt to immobilize the Métis. Historian Sarah Carter observes that Indigenous mobility was perceived as a threat by colonial authorities when it allowed Native people to escape attempts to control and police them (*Capturing Women* 145-48, 183-88; *Aboriginal* 162-64). However, Métis mobility proved useful to the colonial regime after 1870 as the Métis moved further into the hinterland to avoid advancing settlement, and in the early twentieth century when Métis men served as a workforce of itinerant farm labourers. The early presence of Métis people in Western towns and cities meant that for many Canadians in Western Canada, their interaction with Native people was often actually interaction with Métis people. A general lack of awareness that the Métis had survived 1885 as a distinct group led to a generalized disavowal of that difference in Canadian society and culture.

The obverse of Métis mobility toward identification with the "Indian" is the movement of Métis toward identification as "white." In the early years of post-Confederation colonial rule in Western Canada, assimilation was considered a natural and desirable outcome of Métis hybridity, while deep-seated racism ensured that it would be difficult to achieve. The presumption of a desire to assimilate is yet another way in which the social mobility of hybrid people can be used by a dominant group to combat their desire to identify themselves *as* hybrid.

Clearly, the fluidity of Métis hybridity encompassed by the notions of liminality, ambiguity and mobility should be taken into account when contextualizing Métis representations. Nevertheless, as I noted earlier, there is a danger that hybridity theory, like any other critical approach, will fail to truly capture the complexities that arise in comparing those representations. Far from being a universal key for understanding mixedblood people in any situation, hybridity theory can itself lapse into a generality and rigidity that rob it of its heuristic power. That is the conclusion that Loretta Mijares reaches, for example, in studying mixed race Eurasians – also known as "Anglo-Indians"

— in the colonial India on which Bhabha based his theories. Mijares objects that "theoretical abstractions such as hybridity have become rarefied and need to be reconnected to their geographical and historical contexts if they are to retain any efficacy in explaining the processes of identity construction they claim to describe" (125).

Like Mijares, I believe that the antidote to such rigidification lies in bringing greater historical and cultural context to the study of such representations. By definition, writing that purports to contextualize "Native" or even "Aboriginal" experience in Canada, thus presuming that Métis and First Nations share a single experience and point of view, cannot get at the true specificity of the Métis past and present. Likewise, the twofold objections on the part of Native critics to using the term "postcolonial" in discussing Native literature also fail to address the unique position occupied by the Métis in relation to their arguments: on one hand, Thomas King argues that it is illegitimate to apply the term "post-colonial" to Native literature because it erases the fact that Indigenous orature and culture existed prior to the arrival of Europeans and the colonial era (11-12). Looking at the opposite end of the historical spectrum, others make the argument that "the term 'post-colonialism' is meaningless to Aboriginal people, bearing in mind the political, social and economic status we currently occupy" (Heiss 226). According to this view, Aboriginal people are more properly described as living under a neo-colonial regime. Clearly, King's argument does not apply to the Métis, who did not exist prior to colonialism. While the Métis today are affected by some of the same neo-colonial conditions as First Nations people, the fact remains that, historically at least, they are more properly seen as one element of colonialism (insofar as the fur trade was part of that regime) rather than as a people independent of it.

Since neither deconstructive nor postcolonial approaches have managed to elucidate the meanings of the Métis in Canadian literature, I have determined that a thematic approach is the most appropriate way of bringing into the same critical space texts of different genres (novels, poetry, drama and film) produced in different languages (English, French, and some Cree), by authors of different ethnic and national backgrounds (Métis and First Nations, English- and French-Canadians, immigrants and native born). This approach is also sufficiently inclusive to allow me to historicize images of the Métis over the course of two centuries, creating a diachronic depth that is missing from semiotic or intertextual approaches that neglect historical context.

Thematic Criticism

Anglo-Canadian critics have generally eschewed thematic criticism (at least under that label) for the past three decades, ever since Frank Davey excoriated it in "Surviving the Paraphrase" as a rigid and unilluminating search for unifying tropes in Canadian literature – tropes such as Northrop Frye's "garrison mentality," D.G. Jones's "butterfly on rock," or Laurie Ricou's "vertical man, horizontal world" – that invariably turned out to be more reductive than explanatory. Davey's arguments were justified in some respects, and they resulted in thematic criticism becoming almost "universally despised" in Canada (Murray 75). T.D. MacLulich points out, however, that "What the rebellion against thematic criticism really opposes is procrustean criticism, criticism that trims a literary work to fit a preconceived set of extra-literary prejudices" (218). As Russell Brown has argued more recently, other more valid types of thematic criticism are possible, and even the type of thematic criticism Canadian critics have learned to hate can be useful if properly performed.

Brown identifies the type of criticism that was initiated by Frye and further developed by John Moss, Jones, Atwood, and others as "cultural thematics" (681) in which a large body of texts is assembled and read as though it were a single text expressing a single overarching theme. The main drawback of this approach is that it tends to overlook the formal aspects of individual works. It also tends to assume the unity of such formations as "Canadian literature" or "Canadian culture" or the particular theme in question, and then proceeds to *produce* those units through careful selection of the corpus of texts to be studied.

The approach taken here does involve studying a preselected theme, and therefore selecting a corpus of texts on that theme. To avoid the reductive, "procrustean" effects of cultural thematics, however, I have used what Brown calls "comparative thematics" (680), based on a wide variety of texts written in different periods and by authors who write from different ethnoracial subject positions. Where Brown assumes that "thematic criticism emphasizes and values connections more than differences" (681), I would suggest that it is possible and useful to look for differences as well as connections, as I have done here: it is precisely the different inflections given to the Métis theme in the texts included in this study that give the analysis its explicative edge.

Because the main focus of my interpretation is characters who are identified as Métis or mixedblood and the plots created around those characters, I assume the mimetic and rhetorical function of the texts I am studying, meaning that I assume that they are meant to be reflective of real world situations and that they convey messages between the authors and readers of the texts. As James Phelan outlines this type of analytical framework, characters are made up of three components: the *synthetic* component, which may be more or less foregrounded, signals the artificiality of the character as a fictional construct; the *mimetic* component consists of traits, or attributes, that tell the reader this is a possible person; and the *thematic* component accounts for our ability to make larger statements about the significance of the character and the story (2-3). In terms of Jonathan Culler's "rules of significance," this means that one must "read the poem as expressing a significant attitude concerning man and/or his relation to the universe" (115). In the texts under study here, I am reading specifically for messages about what interracial contact and métissage mean to the authors writing about them, messages that they wish to convey to their audiences as constituting some sort of "truth" about the Métis and their origins.

The reader of a literary text reads the different components in characters at two levels – as part of the "authorial audience" and as part of the "narrative audience." The narrative audience receives the narration directly from the narrator. This audience sees only the mimetic dimension of the characters and does not perceive the synthetic or thematic dimensions. "For the mimetic illusion to work," explains Phelan, "we must enter the narrative audience" (5). That is, we must allow ourselves to interpret characters as possible persons (unless the author has purposely foregrounded the synthetic component in order precisely to thematize the artificiality of the fiction, as is often the case in metafictional forms). The authorial audience, on the other hand, is aware of the narrative situation itself but also sees the narrative devices for what they are and interprets the story not merely as an elaborate anecdote or piece of entertainment but as a means of conveying a larger meaning.

It is important to note that not every character trait signifies a larger meaning: incidental traits may be present as mere "dimensions" – details that merely serve to identify a particular individual but that could be changed or removed without affecting the narrative. Where a dimension takes on significance through the progression of the plot, it is converted into a function that can be mimetic, thematic or synthetic. Phelan points out that the potential significance of dimensions cannot be determined *prima facie*, but is revealed as the plot moves forward and patterns develop. Therefore "the rhetorical theorist need not stipulate in advance that the characters in a given work will be represented people, or themes with legs, or obvious artificial constructs. The theorist only commits himself to the position that a character may come to perform any of these functions or indeed all of them to varying degrees within the same narrative" (9). If, for example, a character is described as blue-eyed, that trait may be a neutral feature that could be changed or removed without consequence for the plot. If, however, a character is described as a blue-eyed Ojibwa, the reader's awareness that this departure from the phenotypical norm signals that this trait is likely to have more than incidental significance in the narrative.

Some examples of mimetic, synthetic and thematic components of characters will help illustrate the differences. The mimetic component of characters is easily understood by readers, and is the basis for realism as a form. Having recognized the characters as possible persons acting within a possible world, the reader is already engaged in the process of interpreting the meaning of the narrative based on their knowledge of the real world. When, for example, Georges Bugnet describes his character Nipsya as a girl who has just turned sixteen and who "commen[ce] d'entendre en soi-même des appels inconnus et comme un chant de désirs, vague et grandissant," he signals to the reader that the protagonist is to be understood as a girl who is entering womanhood with all the confusion and emotional turmoil that is involved. Nipsya is attuned to the voices of the forest around her, writes the author, "Mais elle ne soupçonnait pas encore où chercher la voix qui répondît à la sienne" (73). This phrase provides the framework and motivation for the narrative that follows, in which Nipsya must choose among three potential mates.

In Bruce White's account of the "Story of the Young Woman Who Married a Beaver" told by Kagige Pinasi (Ojibwa-French), the young woman marries a "person in human form" who looks like a young man but turns out to be a beaver. The father and their children visit human beings who kill the beavers. "Yet the beavers were never really killed" (110), but instead return home with many useful gifts. Here, the synthetic aspect of characters is foregrounded, but their thematic component is fully developed. As White explains, this tale conveys messages on many levels: for example, it was told by elders to instruct young people in the principle of environmental reciprocity. It can also be understood as conveying a message about the importance of women's roles as intermediaries in the interactions between Indians and 'Others' – not beavers, but Europeans.

As the previous example shows, narratives are not restricted to a single overarching theme or message. A whole set of thematic functions may be at work simultaneously, one of which may be emphasized during a particular telling (or reading) of the story without erasing the others. As a final example that illustrates the activation of the thematic function of narratives, I will refer to Pamela Sing's interpretation of Métis characters in Nancy Huston's *Cantique des plaines* and Marguerite-A. Primeau's *Dans le muskeg* ("Voix métisse"). Sing interprets these characters in part as alter egos for the authors that reflect their discomfort with the national or linguistic categories offered by Canadian society. This thematic reading of métissage is based on information derived from Sing's belonging not only to the narrative audience but also to the authorial audience, with access to broader knowledge than that provided by the narrative itself. In this case, the mimetic aspects of Métis characters are converted into a thematic function based on abstracting the attribute of racial hybridity into a more general notion of cultural liminality.

Unlike Phelan's analysis, which is aimed at selecting texts that demonstrate the widest possible variation in the relations between character and progression, this study is delimited from the outset to a corpus of fictional texts with protagonists or secondary characters given the attribute "Métis" (or an equivalent description). The question then is to see what other attributes are attached to that descriptor, how those attributes are used in plot progression, and how they are converted into thematic content.

Structure

The thematic and historical approach I take in this comparative study is intended to do justice to the wide range of Métis representations in Canadian literature. To consider the Métis simply as the outcome of "Indian-white" contact is to erase the rich history of the Western fur trade in which the Métis came into existence. Most notably, now that "white" has generally come to mean "Anglo-Canadian" in Western Canada, use of that word obscures the French-Canadian component of historical Métis hybridity and the part played by English-French relations in the history of Western Canada. Examining the representations of the Métis in French and English texts side by side allows me to emphasize the multiple meanings attached to Métis hybridity as the result of racial, linguistic, and cultural identifications and inscriptions that fall outside a simple white-Indian binary. I also look at texts by both Métis and non-Métis authors as a way of highlighting the broad differences between their approaches to Métis themes and the significance of current Métis resistance or "writing back" to non-Métis representations. This comparison between recent and historical Métis texts illustrates the fact that the Métis renewal currently under way is both a "renewal" and a "reconstruction" of Métis identity and ideology around métissage. In short, Métis representations in Canadian literature add up to "mixed messages" precisely because of the sheer variety of authorial positions that have been taken up, over the past two centuries, in writing on Métis themes.

In Chapter One, I examine those early years and the flourishing of Métis self-awareness in the nineteenth century through the texts of two iconic figures: the bard Pierre Falcon, who celebrated in song the "Battle of Frog Plain" of 1816. Both the battle and the song stand as markers of proto-nationalism that would reach its apogee later in the century with the political and military actions led by Louis Riel in 1869-70 and 1885. The leader and Métis intellectual left a body of writings in which he expresses his own sense of Métisness, which was mainly founded on a sense of connection to his French-Canadian roots and his Catholic faith. Nonetheless, in delineating a Métisness that encompassed both the Franco-Métis and the English "halfbreeds," Riel relied on racial duality – the Indian and white heritages of all Métis – as a common denominator that distinguished his people from all of the other groups in Canada. Riel's own vision was that the Métis of Western Canada were a chosen people who had been placed on the land by God for a great purpose, but with the defeat of the North-West Resistance and Riel's execution in 1885, followed by a flood of white Anglo-Canadian settlers into the West, that vision disappeared and the Métis became subjected to the new "scientific" theories of race and miscegenation that had gained ascendancy in European ideas of human groups and their interactions.

Chapter Two reflects the switch of discursive control over images of the Métis from Métis people themselves to Euro-Canadians after 1885. In this chapter, I discuss two novels by French immigrants who portray Métis protagonists and their relations with other groups in a society in transition from the fur trade to agricultural settlement. Reflecting an idealized view of the Métis as "French people with a difference" in the

Canadian West, Georges Bugnet and Maurice Constantin-Weyer identify Anglo-Canadian racism as the most destructive force facing the Métis as they work to find a place within the new social and economic realities in their homeland. In contrast, Anglo-Canadian author Ralph Connor depicts interracial sex and the mixedblood offspring who result from it as throwbacks to a primitive era in Canadian history, a history that he believes must be transcended through the assimilation of mixedbloods. Connor's purportedly sympathetic treatment of 'halfbreeds' actually reveals the poisonous racial attitudes that help explain the severe pressures on Métis people in the first half of the twentieth century that led alternately to assimilation or marginalization as the mixed blood that was held up as a badge of honour by Riel became stigmatized as a racial taint in a society intent on establishing whiteness as the norm for Canadian identity.

The dominance of non-Métis authors continues into the mid-twentieth century, the era that I discuss in Chapter Three. In her portrait of a Franco-Albertan community, Marguerite Primeau examines the ways in which Métis difference can be turned against the Métis by a French-Canadian community as anxiety about the survival of the minority sparks a backlash based on lingering racism, turning the Métis from "ideal" Western Francophones to "others" who come under suspicion because of their lack of ethnic purity. Mort Forer, an Anglo-Manitoban author, paints an even more disturbing portrait of a Métis community hanging on the brink of disappearance owing to the inexorable loss of all collective consciousness. Two other Anglo-Canadian writers are also discussed in this chapter: Margaret Laurence and Rudy Wiebe, who are overwhelmingly sympathetic toward the Métis, in stark contrast with an author such as Connor, indicating the enormous shift that was taking place in Anglo-Canadian attitudes under the impact of a new ideology of multiculturalism in which ethnic differences would become the new hallmark of Canadianness. Laurence offers a close-up view of the devastation of Métis families living on the fringes of white society, as well as the strength they derive from collective memories of Métis greatness passed down through stories and song. In his historical novel, Wiebe returns to that time of greatness to create a Métis-centred narrative of the nineteenth-century political and military resistance aimed at creating understanding and sympathy, in contradistinction to the old Anglo-Canadian attitudes of denigration and hostility toward the Métis.

Despite the turn to more understanding and sympathetic portrayals of the Métis in white-authored texts, the literary landscape changed monumentally in 1973 with the publication of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, one of the two autobiographical accounts discussed in Chapter Four. Indirectly demonstrating the limitations of white sympathy, Campbell gives Canadian readers a close-up, inside view of a community, a family, and an individual life that were both unique and full of vitality but also under constant threat from the outside. In contrast with the male-centred accounts of Métisness found in Falcon and Riel (and reconstructed by Wiebe), Campbell constructs a female-centred Métis identity that, modelled on the powerful figure of her great-grandmother, emphasizes the Indian side of Métis heritage. This reconstruction of Métis identity is echoed by Christine Welsh, a filmmaker who tells her own story about discovering her Métis ancestry, which she traces back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As she tells the stories of her Native grandmothers, stories that have been suppressed as a result of the masculine bias in official fur trade history, Welsh continues the process of discursively embracing the (Indian) female ancestor and rejecting the (white) male ancestor, thus inadvertently raising questions about the morality of the contact that gave rise to the Métis in the first place.

A veritable explosion of Métis writing, as well as writing by First Nations authors on the theme of métissage, has appeared in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, most of it in the form of poetry and plays. I examine a number of these texts in Chapter Five: some of them celebrate Métis identity, in particular by emphasizing some of the hidden resources of personal and community resilience that managed to maintain tenuous links with the Métis past in the face of enormous socioeconomic adversity. Gregory Scofield and Merelda Fiddler both offer accounts of reconnecting with Métis roots that they have nearly lost as the result of family break-up. While neither avoids evoking the pain and difficulty of discovering ways of reasserting an ethnic identity that they do not feel they fully possess, the poet and the filmmaker focus on the current state of Métis ethnicity, including material culture, life practices and symbols of Métisness, rather than on contact history as a source of identity. In the poems discussed here, Marilyn Dumont writes of the joys of Métis family life and the pain of being judged and found wanting by both whites and treaty Indians. Authors who do turn their attention to contact history, including such authors as Monique Mojica, Louise Halfe, and Sharron Proulx-Turner, do so by evoking female Aboriginal ancestors who bear witness to the genocidal aspects of contact. While these authors discursively empower Aboriginal women by giving them "voice" in their texts, they further complicate the status of the

Métis by representing their ethnogenesis as a part of the "genocidal" process of Indian-European contact.

CHAPTER I

MÉTIS BEGINNINGS: NATIONALITY AND IDENTITY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The process of métissage began from the moment of first contact between Indian peoples and Europeans in what is now Canada, but it was not inevitable that a substantial mixed-blood population would develop a separate identity as a mixed-blood group, as can be seen by comparison with mixed-blood people in the United States. Historian John Foster notes that there is a fundamental distinction between métis people as a collection of mixedblood individuals and the Métis as a self-conscious group or "new nation," an idea that formed only in the early nineteenth century (80-81). The distinction between those two ideas – people of mixed Indian and European blood and people who think of themselves as a separate ethnoracial group – is reflected in the spelling of "Métis" with a capital for latter group.[10] Historian Gilles Havard, after describing a complex process of métissage in the Great Lakes area that began in 1660, similarly concludes that "La colonisation française, aux XVII^{e}-XVIII^{e} siècles, avait créé dans l'intérieur du continent une région du milieu, un 'pays' particulier fondé sur les échanges et les emprunts, sans pour autant donner naissance à un peuple distinct. À défaut d'être un 'pays métis', le Pays d'en Haut fut cependant un laboratoire du métissage" (785).

When Foster refers to "the problem of metis roots," then, he means the difficulty of determining the point at which shared origins are translated into a new group consciousness: that of the Métis. It was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that such a group consciousness – or sense of nationhood – emerged. Foster posits that the catalyst was actually a psychological turning point amongst the métis people of the Upper Great Lakes. Prior to 1759 this population had their "eyes turned toward Montreal,"[11] implying an identification with their paternal side: "One has a sense of Canadien [i.e., French-Canadian] communities which happen to have mixed-blood components but do not see themselves as distinct from Canadien" (80). The crucial point is a fundamental change in a psychological relationship triggered by a distant event: "For the métis to attain self-consciousness in the population or populations of mixed-bloods that inhabited the Upper Great Lakes they would have to see themselves as distinct from the communities in and around Montreal. For historians, the event that would have engendered such a response would logically be the conquest of New France" (80). The Métis begin to develop a self-consciousness that would ultimately develop into a sense of nationhood at the point when they stopped thinking of Montreal as a symbolic centre.

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[10] I examine the confusing question of naming in further detail in Chapter Five.

This formulation of the change in Métis consciousness suggests a shift in geo-political allegiance of the Métis as they loosen their imagined ties to a (distant) colonial centre and replace them with a new sense of belonging in the North-West. That sense of belonging is bolstered by a growing feeling that the Métis occupy a privileged position in the North-West, which in turn becomes a desire to assert their autonomy. Shifting allegiance in this way does not mean that the Métis rejected wholesale the French-Canadian aspects of Métis culture and ideology. The defining trait of métissage is that multiple cultural and ideological features are woven into the fabric of a new identity and therefore cannot be dismissed as "inauthentic" or "foreign" to Métis people.

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[11] This phenomenon is seen in other mixedblood groups: Mijares notes, for example, that one distinguishing feature of the Anglo-Indians during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that "England was 'Home', even for those who had never left India" (126).

Tracing the development of a distinct métis identity through members of the Desjarlais family in the Lesser Slave Lake region (in what is now northern Alberta), Heather Devine notes that one brother worked as an interpreter for the North-West Company and therefore maintained closer links with his French-Canadian heritage, while two of his brothers became leaders of Ojibwa and Cree hunting bands and adopted Indian culture. All of those men lost their positions after the 1821 amalgamation of the fur-trading companies under the HBC and as a result of failure in hunting. Since returning to Montreal with their Native families was impossible, the alternative was to establish separate "proto-Métis hunting bands" that would allow them to continue benefiting from their relationships with both fur traders and Native bands (*People* 99-108; "Les Desjarlais" 131-33, 146-47). Many métis freemen, like the Desjarlais, subsequently chose to move to the area of Red River to be near their kinsmen, creating the conditions for endogamous métissage that would further build the community. Devine does not attempt to explain, however, why a métis trader such as Tullibee, who had integrated into Cree culture, would feel compelled to "establis[h] himself, his country wife, and his métis children in a group apart from the aboriginal parent band" (*People* 107). This disposition is not explained and may well be impossible to explain in the absence of contemporary records. It is, nevertheless, equally important as the severing of ties with Montreal in explaining the development of a separate Métis identity. Indeed, it presupposes the feeling of "separateness" underlying such an identity – the sense of a "people who own themselves" (the meaning of the Cree word for métis freemen: *Otipemisiwak*) (xvii).

The basis for a collective identity was clearly available to métis people who did not fully identify with either of their ancestral cultures. Yet the Métis did more than merely "fail" to identify with a parent culture: the particular strength of the Métis is that they lived in conditions that allowed them to establish new cultural forms distinct enough from either parent culture to constitute a new culture. What was required was that they detach themselves both materially and psychologically from their dual origins and begin to think of themselves as a new group. The necessary distinction was achieved through the idea that the Métis were a "new nation" in the North-West. While métissage is one component of Métis nationality, it does not in itself constitute nationality. As Benedict Anderson points out, the transformation of a community into a nation requires *imagination*, not in the negative sense of falsity but in the positive sense of creativity (6).

The best articulation of how Métis nationality was constructed before 1885 is found in an essay written by Louis Riel shortly before his execution. In "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest," Riel constructs a comprehensive argument for the existence and claims of the Métis nation based primarily on mixed race, land claims, interests, and institutions of law and government. In the first section that follows, I examine these elements of Métis nationality as Riel perceives them.

In the second section, I look in detail at Riel's conception of métissage and of his own Métis identity. There are in fact discordances between the idea of the Métis as a unified people primarily defined by métissage irrespective of the father's ethnic background and Riel's own conception of the foundations of his own Métis identity. That is because Riel was extremely proud of his French-Canadian heritage, including the French language, Catholic faith, and Franco-European values of civilization and progress. While he attributes these latter values to the Métis in general, his definition of the Métis as mixedblood people whose paternal ancestors were "les anciens employés des compagnies de la Baie d'Hudson et du Nord-Ouest" (3: 278) – so both French and Scots/English – precludes the use of language and religion as unifying factors.

Riel sets out his ideas on Métis identity in essays and in poetry, which he composed throughout his life to express his personal, religious, and political views, to celebrate people he admired, and to vilify his enemies. What emerges most powerfully from these writings is that, while insisting that he took pride in his Indian blood, Riel identified most closely with his French-Canadian ancestry. In many respects, his view of métissage draws him into belief in a hierarchy within which the Métis, though a "primitive" people, are superior to the Indians. In a draft of his essay on the Métis, he notes that "Les métis par leur supériorité en tout sur les tribus indiennes les dominaient" (3: 274), a domination that in turn made the fur trade possible. The hierarchization of races contained in this statement, implying that the Métis derive their superiority over Indians from their European heritage, is one of the pitfalls of race thinking that makes Riel's views contradictory. At the same time, Riel's adoption of some form of racial hierarchy should not be construed as anything more than a reflection of the reigning ideology of the times. As anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle points out, "toute mise en avant de l'origine, qu'elle soit une ou multiple, a pour effet de renforcer la croyance en la ou les race(s)" ("Black" 35). The development of race thinking as a justification for colonial regimes means that this focus on race ultimately becomes a liability for the Métis rather than a simple statement of origins.

Both aspects of Métis identity – one based on a unified "national" consciousness and the other a hybridity-based consciousness – lead to a heavily masculine bias in these identities as they are formulated in nineteenth-century discourse. That bias is significant because of the gender/race parallel that runs through stories of colonial métissage involving white male colonizers and Native women. As I argue during the course of this study, the male-oriented interpretation of the Canadian Métis in the nineteenth century tends to Europeanize them, while the female-oriented interpretations of the late twentieth century tend, conversely, to indigenize the Métis.

Métis Nationality in Pierre Falcon's "Chanson de la Grenouillère" and Louis Riel's "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest" and "La Métisse"

In Riel's essay on "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest," (3: 278-94), which was published in the Montreal *Daily Star* in 1885, he sets out the justification for the Métis' claims to land and self-rule in Western Canada and their grievances against the Canadian government. In the first half of the essay, he uses the rhetorical approach of *describing* the

Métis people in terms that bolster the idea that they exist as a nation.[12] He begins by stating that mixed race is fundamental to Métis identity. Recognizing, however, as Ernest Renan had contended, that ethnicity or "race" does not itself make a nation, Riel focuses on several other attributes, most notably land title, territorial control, and the precedence of Métis laws and institutions.

Riel begins the essay with a broad statement of the Métis as defined by dual ancestry: "Les Métis ont pour ancêtres paternels les anciens employés des compagnies de la Baie d'Hudson et du Nord-Ouest, et pour ancêtres maternels des femmes sauvages appartenant aux diverses tribus" (3: 278). This definition, which encompasses both the Franco-Métis usually called "Métis" in French and the Anglo-Métis called "Halfbreeds" in English at that time, is clearly aimed at maximizing the number of people covered by the idea of "Métis" and suggesting that their common interests take precedence over any other potential divisions between them. This argument precludes references to language and religion, which are commonly understood as self-evident signs of nationality or ethnicity, and thus requires that Riel emphasize the unifying force of other features: Métis land title, legal institutions, and "civilized" values that distinguish the Métis from their Indian kin and neighbours.[13]

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[12] More specifically, he wants to demonstrate the objective existence of Métis nationhood throughout the North-West before 1870 to substantiate Métis claims and explain why they were justified in taking up arms against an unjust government.

[13] Concurring with the distinction generally made by European writers of the period, Riel refers to "civilized" and "primitive" people, making what he understands as a legitimate distinction between European and Native cultures. "Civilization" is now understood to be a Eurocentric construction when it refers to Western or European culture, including such aspects as Christian religion, civil and state

While it is clear that the fundamental grounds for Métis title to land in the North-West are their Indian ancestry, Riel adds further aspects to their claim: that before Confederation, the Métis had some form of control over the territory and had improved the land (a claim that also responded to homesteading requirements based on settling a piece of land for a certain period and making improvements on it). Since there are still Indian people inhabiting the land, Riel must concede that the Métis "avaient la propriété du sol conjointement avec les Sauvages" (3: 279). To emphasize the losses faced by his people as a result of their entry into Confederation, he calculates the dollar value of the land owned by the Indians and the Métis. The Métis land is worth more, states Riel, because the Métis built on it, "la labouraient, la clôturaient et l'employaient à beaucoup plus grand avantage que ne faisaient les Indiens; à ce point qu'elle valait dans le moins deux fois plus à eux qu'aux Sauvages, c'est-à-dire pendant que l'Indien pouvait raisonnablement demander 15 cents pour son acre, le Métis était en droit d'en exiger 30 pour le sien" (3: 279).

This approach to the question is meant to appeal "aux hommes d'affaires et aux capitalistes" in the East (3: 280). At the same time, Riel is relying on "the ancient pre-Enlightenment doctrine by which the land belongs to those who work it and by which those who work it belong to the land – an identity rooted in the inhabitation of a place, which empire must necessarily repress" (Angus 889). Riel foresees the potential reply that Euro-Canadian migrants are cultivating the land more extensively than the Métis, who

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institutions, education, and agriculture. Chapter Two contains further discussion of the "civilization/savagery" binary as an underpinning for colonialism.

practice subsistence farming. He defuses that argument by charging that the Hudson's Bay Company and England, enforcing their monopoly in the North-West, closed the region to market forces to ensure that the Métis had no outlet for sales of excess farm produce, so that it was not in their interest to develop their agricultural base any further. "Sous le joug des Aventuriers de la Baie d'Hudson," says Riel, "il était impossible aux Métis de prendre leur essor comme population" (3: 281). Apart from these pragmatic ideas, however, Riel knows that the most convincing image is that of a people living in its own homeland: "Lorsque la Puissance arriva au Nord-Ouest en '70," he points out, "[elle] y trouva les Métis qui, par le fait même d'être chez eux et d'avoir leur pays à eux, avaient comme tout autre peuple, leur avenir" (3: 281). When writing to a Catholic audience, as I show below, he presents the Métis' future in even stronger terms as a God-given destiny.

Despite his earlier admission that the HBC controlled the North-West, Riel is at pains to explain that this meant mercantile control only. In all other respects, he says, the Métis were the true masters of the land, so that the HBC "était environnée du gouvernement des Métis dans toute la zone fertile" and its employees worked and traded "sous l'autorité du Conseil de la Prairie et sous la protection des lois métisses" (3: 283). These laws derive, according to Riel, from an effective form of ad hoc government that governed the Métis buffalo hunt. The organization of the hunt included units of ten ordinary "soldiers" (buffalo hunters) and an elected "captain" (3: 282). There were rules on the timing of the hunt and conduct during it, as well as sanctions for infringement. The rules were established by a council that constituted a "gouvernement provisoire" (3: 282) and that worked democratically, so that on any important matter the council "recourait au publique, et ne basait ses décisions que sur une majorité de tous les chasseurs" (3: 283).

The example of the buffalo hunt as a highly organized endeavour was important, because the hunt was precisely the aspect of Métis life that outsiders considered the most "wild" and unruly. Travellers who had the chance to witness a Métis hunt often included in their travel narratives a description of its excitement, with colourful characters, fast horses, impressive marksmanship, and great danger (Pelletier 40-41; Ross 256-61; Grant 210-11). Because it derived from the buffalo-hunting practice of the Plains Indians, the hunt was one of the aspects of Métis life that most closely linked them to an Indian lifestyle. By emphasizing the highly regimented side of the Métis hunt, Riel could distinguish them from Indian hunters and counteract the stereotype of the wild, lawless Métis. Even at their most rough and colourful, they were "un peuple neuf mais civilisé, et jouissant d'un gouvernement à lui, fondé sur les vraies notions de la liberté publique et sur celles de l'équité" (3: 283).

In surrounding the HBC with their rough-hewn legal and civil institutions, says Riel, the Métis brought order to a region that the company would not otherwise have been able to police. Here, Riel does not hesitate to use the image of Indian violence when it serves his rhetorical strategy of emphasizing his people's role in civilizing the west. "[Il] n'y a pas encore bien longtemps les indiens étaient barbares" (3: 283), and became even more dangerous once they obtained guns. By invoking the notion of Indian savagery, Riel distinguishes the Métis from the Indians while at the same time suggesting that the links between them give the Métis a natural advantage in dealing with them: "Les métis sont les hommes qui domptèrent ces nations sauvages par leurs armes, et qui, ensuite, les adoucirent, par les bonnes relations qu'ils entretenaient avec elles à la faveur de la paix. Ce sont eux qui mirent au prix de leur sang, la tranquillité dans le Nord-Ouest" (3: 284). The Canadian government should be grateful to the Métis, he is saying, for using their power as intermediaries to make the North-West a safe place for Euro-Canadians.

Quite apart from serving as an argument for fair treatment, the notion that the Métis have kept the peace at the price of their blood is reminiscent of what Renan calls the most powerful force for a sense of nationhood. According to Renan, ethnicity, language, religion, and territory are not sufficient to form a nation. Above all, a nation is forged by a common history and in the present, by a "principe spirituel" (33) the moral consciousness of a group of people who wish to continue living together. That moral consciousness is put to the test above all when individuals must make sacrifices for the sake of the collective, and the suffering the group endures is its most potent unifying force: "la souffrance en commun unit plus que la joie. [...] En fait de souvenirs nationaux, les deuils valent mieux que les triomphes, car ils imposent des devoirs, ils commandent l'effort en commun" (34). While the Métis are willing to join with the other members of the Confederation to form a larger national unit, they also demand that the Canadian government acknowledge the sacrifices they have made – the blood they have shed to hold the territory and keep the peace – and give the Métis their due.[14] Ironically, it would be Riel's death and the defeat of the Métis at Batoche that ultimately constituted their greatest suffering and ensured that they maintained a collective moral consciousness despite all the successful efforts to disperse them and erase the past by absorbing them into a new Anglo-Canadian national consciousness.

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[14] Reviewing the place of Louis Riel in English-Canadian political thought, Ian Angus says that "it seems that he is acceptable within Canadian civil culture only to the slight extent that the Métis claimed to be, and were recognized by Ottawa to be, or be willing to become, rights-bearing Englishmen, and thus he has been banished to exactly the extent that the Métis claimed an original self-constitution" (885). This suggests that

Finally, Riel demonstrates that Métis land title is based on three things: inheritance from maternal ancestors who held Indian title; defence of the land at the price of their own blood; and their work to improve the land, which was hampered only by lack of access to more advanced agricultural tools and know-how. The last point would be dismissed by Anglo-Canadian settlers who felt that the Métis made indifferent farmers at best; the notion of a Métis sacrifice in the form of bloodshed was held against them instead of in their favour, since it was associated in the Anglo-Canadian mind with rebellion rather than glorious feats of arms. In other words, nearly every argument that Riel put forward to lay claim to greater recognition and compensation for the Métis could be turned against them (or, given the powerful position of the Anglo-Canadians, simply ignored). Their Indian title was the only part of their claim that was recognized, and even then, it was dealt with so haphazardly and even underhandedly that the claims were never met to the satisfaction of the Métis.[15]

Riel's arguments for recognition of Métis collective identity and their "nation"-based claims were sure to be rejected because they threatened the competing self-constitution of Canadian nationality.

[15] For an overview of the Métis scrip issue see Barkwell, Dorion and Préfontaine 30-31, Pannekoek 117-19, Tough 304-05, and Milne's overview of the historiography on this subject. Frank Tough is currently director of the Métis Archival Project at the University of Alberta's School of Native Studies, which is dedicated to research on Métis scrip and genealogy.

As is clear from the ideas presented in Riel's essay, his description of Métis national identity is intended for an Anglo-Canadian audience and is calibrated accordingly. In the song that is considered the earliest expression of Métis group identity, the audience is Métis, and therefore the rhetorical approach appeals to a different set of values. The "Chanson de la Grenouillère" (1816) (known in English as the "Battle of Seven Oaks") is presumed to have been composed by Pierre Falcon immediately after the battle for which it is named.[16] In the battle of La Grenouillère, a group of Métis confronted and killed 20 Scottish settlers from the Selkirk settlement (founded in 1812) and their English leader, Governor Robert Semple, in a struggle to maintain control over access to their buffalo hunting territory and the lucrative pemmican trade that depended on the hunt.[17]

The full text of one of the versions of the song is as follows:[18]

Voulez-vous écouter chanter
Une chanson de vérité?
Le dix-neuf de juin, la band' des Bois-Brûlés
Sont arrivés com' des braves guerriers.

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[16] The scholarly consensus is that Falcon was present at the event, although Jacques Julien also notes that there has been a tendency to conflate Falcon's life and songs, so that the bard is assumed to have been an eyewitness to the various events that were the subjects of his compositions (118).

[17] For a full account of the incident, its background and subsequent conflicting interpretations, see Lyle Dyck, "The Seven Oaks Incident and the Construction of a Historical Tradition, 1816 to 1970."

[18] This version, considered authoritative, was taken from Hargrave (488-89). The variant referred to is reproduced in *Cinq Mois chez les Français d'Amérique* by Henri de Lamothe.

En arrivant à la Grenouillère

Nous avons fait trois prisonniers;

Trois prisonniers des Arkanys

Qui sont ici pour piller not' pays.

Étant sur le point de débarquer

Deux de nos gens se sont écriés

Deux de nos gens se sont écriés

Voilà l'Anglais qui vient nous attaquer.

Tout aussitôt nous avons déviré

Avons été les rencontrer

J'avons cerné la band' des Grenadiers

Ils sont immobiles, ils sont tout démontés.

J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur,

J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur,

Le gouverneur, voulez-vous arrêter

Un p'tit moment, nous voulons vous parler.

Le gouverneur qui est enragé

Il dit à ses soldats: Tirez!

Le premier coup c'est l'Anglais qu'a tiré,
L'ambassadeur ils ont manqué tuer.

Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur
Il veut agir avec rigueur:
Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur
A son malheur, agit trop de rigueur.

Ayant vu passer tous ces Bois-Brûlés
Il a parti pour les épouvanter:
Étant parti pour les épouvanter;
Il s'est trompé, il s'est bien fait tuer.

Il s'est bien fait tuer
Quantité de grenadiers
J'avons tué presque tout' son armée,
Sur la band' quatre ou cinq s' sont sauvés.

Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglais
Et tous ces Bois-Brûlés après
De butte and butte les Anglais culbutaient.
Les Bois-Brûlés jetaient des cris de joie.

Qui en a composé la chanson
Pierre Falcon, poète du canton.
Elle a été faite et composée
Sur la victoire que nous avons gagnée.
Elle a été faite et composée
Chantons la gloire de tous les Bois-Brûlés.

This song has been referred to as the Métis "national anthem" (McLean 43), more out of an understanding of its long popularity than from any such explicit intention in the text itself. Expressing a Euro-Canadian perspective, Lyle Dick points out evidence of the poem's hasty composition, which suggests that it was meant to serve as an occasional piece of verse and only later took on greater significance: "The 1816 version was quite unpolished, showing irregular metrical patterns, imperfect rhyming, and an absence of alliteration. The contents of this hastily composed account evidently were determined more by the desire to relate particular details than the discourse needs of a particular literary structure" (99). While this judgment might apply to the written composition, the oral form of Falcon's verse should more properly be seen within the context of Métis oral artistry as an aspect of daily life. The practice of incorporating story, song, and music into their everyday lives and thereby to record important events or characters in collective memory is consistent with Aboriginal orality as well as with French-Canadian oral practices.[19] The evidence of its power as a piece of orature can be seen in its powerful rhetorical thrust. The details that are chosen for inclusion, and in particular the terms in which they are related, are calculated to appeal to Métis pride and sensitivities.

The "Chanson" is an expression at once of disdain for interlopers in Métis country and of pride in a Métis victory over those interlopers. While the signs of nascent nationalism – self-regard for an in-group defined by a name, and claims to a territory that must be defended from incursion – are important, the poem is not a mere expression of a pre-existing nationalist sentiment: it is a *performance* of nationhood aimed at building national consciousness through its rhetorical effects. The success of those effects is attested to by the enormous popularity of the song amongst the Métis, which in turn lifted the incident and its commemoration to "national" significance.

The Métis are seen as brave and honourable but unassuming men prevailing over a group of outsiders with an overconfident leader. The outsiders are referred to first as "Arkanys," or Orkneymen, a misnomer for the Scottish settlers brought by Lord Selkirk to establish an agricultural settlement meant to become a source of provisions for the Hudson's Bay Company. The enemy is later more broadly defined as "l'Anglais" at the point where he attacks the Bois-Brûlés.[20] To produce an exciting narrative of conflict and action, the song begins in the midst of the action, with no explanation of background, as a group of "braves guerriers" takes three Orkneymen prisoners, presumably because they are there to "piller not' pays." The fact that no context is given for the conflict and the clear-cut depiction of who is good (the brave warriors) and who is bad (the pillagers of their country) show that the poet is relying on an essential aspect of oral tradition by expressing ideas and emotions about the conflict that his audience already shares. As the opening lines suggest, the poet's rhetoric is in part intended to convince the audience that he is telling the truth about the events, but the tone of glee with which he conveys the complete destruction of the Anglo-Scots enemy indicates that he knows that his listeners will already be inclined to greet the account as one of Métis glory.

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[19] See Julien on the French-Canadian oral aspect of Falcon's verse, and Ridington on oral literature in Canada.

[20] Prior to the 1821 merger of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the North-West Companyh, the HBC often hired Scotsmen from the Orkney Islands to work in Rupert's Land (J. Brown, *Strangers* 27-28); the Selkirk settlers were Highland Scots (Ens 9). It is possible that Falcon is using "Orkanys" as a term for any Scotsman, or that he wishes to indicate that to him, the enemy is the HBC more than the settlers themselves. The latter interpretation would also help explain why he later refers to the enemy as Englishmen, since the HBC was an English enterprise and most of its senior officers were English (J. Brown, *Strangers* 45-46).

It should be noted that in its early form, Métis nationalism assumed the French background of the Métis. Here they are called by their early name, the "Bois-Brûlés,"[21] a term used early on for Franco-Métis, which was true of the word "Métis" itself as well, which only later evolved to cover Anglo-Métis people. Riel, when writing English versions of his texts, uses the term "Halfbreed" to translate the French word "Métis."[22] Clearly, the nomenclature is confusing, particularly given the current practice of using the word “Métis” (or Metis) to refer to all those who historically may have called themselves “Métis” (or “Métis-Canadien-Français) or “Halfbreed.” This shifting naming practice is in itself indicative of the fluid nature of Métis identity (both individual and collective) and the political significance behind those names. The organization of resistance amongst the Métis in Red River in 1869-70 and in the North-West in 1885 involved to a great extent efforts to unite Franco- and Anglo-Métis in order to press their claims to land and political autonomy more powerfully (Siggins 111-16).[23] For my purposes, one of the most important points about these shifting naming practices is that, to some extent, the Indian component of Métis hybridity was understood, while the European component (which often also determined the main language used) was a source of difference and even friction.

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[21] The origins of the name are unclear. Jennifer Brown writes that it may have come from the practice of slash-and-burn or "burnt-stump" agriculture practised in the Great Lakes region ("Métis" 107). Sealey contends that the name came from an Ojibway word meaning "burnt wood" or "burnt sticks" that alluded to the Métis' lighter complexion ("One Plus One" 7).

[22] For example, in his autobiographical notes in English, where he refers to his election as secretary of the "Halfbreed National Committee" (3: 263). In his essay on the Métis, Riel notes that the English word is inappropriate because it applies (literally) only to the first mixed-race generation: "Toute appropriée que l'expression anglaise correspondante, Halfbreed, fût à la première génération du mélange des sangs, maintenant que le sang européen et le sang sauvage sont mêlés à tous les degrés elle n'est plus assez générale" (3: 278).

What made the Battle of Seven Oaks a clear-cut occasion for Métis unification is that it pitted full-blood white European settlers against the Métis. Freshly arrived from Europe and unassimilated into the fur trade *per se*, Selkirk's settlers were the first group of clearly identifiable "others" in contrast with whom a Métis identity could coalesce. It may be that sense of animosity toward those outsiders that prompts Don McLean to call the Chanson "a song of hatred" (43), but that is not the only emotion conveyed by the song. Once the action has begun with the taking of prisoners, it continues as a result of the group's ability to act quickly when they realize that the English are coming to attack them. They surround the Englishmen and gain the upper hand, but act with honour and restraint: "J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur / J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur."

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[23] Irene Spry argues that the divisions between the two groups had arisen only in the years just prior to 1870, and that before that period there had been a great deal of intermarriage and social mixing between French Métis and English mixed-bloods.

In contrast to the calm and well-organized Bois-Brûlés, Semple is portrayed as a leader whose greatest fault, in the eyes of the Métis, is his assumption of superiority and entitlement: he is "Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur." This line is echoed in subsequent poems by Falcon, in which he mocks English officials who come to the North-west and put on "kingly" airs ("Tribulations"). The idea of an overreaching outsider presuming to take over Métis land represents one of the main touchstones of Métis national feeling throughout the nineteenth century: that the Métis alone are masters of their "country" (that is, the north-western plains in general and the area around Red River in particular), mixed with resentment at the assumption of superiority made by those outsiders.

In material terms, the claim to Métis territorial control was advanced not only through the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816 but also in the Sayer affair in 1849,[24] the Battle of the Grand Coteau in 1851,[25] the Red River resistance of 1969-70, and finally the North-West Resistance of 1885 that culminated in the Métis defeat at the Battle of

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[24] The Royal Commisson on Aboriginal Peoples report sums up the affair in this way: "In 1849, the Hudson's Bay Company again tried to restrict Métis fur trading, this time by prosecuting Métis trader Guillaume Sayer in its own court for allegedly violating its trade monopoly. A massive demonstration of Métis people in and around the Red River courthouse resulted in a decision that did not impose any penalty on Sayer. It thus conveyed a clear message that the company's trading monopoly was no longer enforceable. A Métis observer in the courthouse shouted to his confrères outside the building, 'Le commerce est libre!', and history concurred" (Vol. 4, Chap. 5, part 2, par. 6).

[25] In this battle on the prairie, a small group of Métis buffalo hunters repelled an attack by the Dakota Sioux, thus consolidating their control over the buffalo-hunting territory between Red River and Pembina. (Morton 47; Trémaudan 143-45).

Batoche. As this series of confrontations shows, the Métis defined themselves and their place in the world in contradistinction to many kinds of others: Scottish settlers, Hudson's Bay Company management, the Dakota Sioux, and Anglo-Canadians (meaning Protestants in particular) from Ontario. In the context of setting out their territorial claims, the Métis distinguished themselves from Indians. Even during the 1885 resistance, when the Métis actively sought alliances with Cree and other Native bands in their battle with the Canadian government, they found common cause in their ill treatment or neglect by the government, not in the specific grounds of their claims.[26]

In all of those conflicts except the last, the Métis demonstrated their ability to outmanoeuvre their opponents. At Seven Oaks, Falcon tells us, the English are badly mistaken in trying to frighten the Métis with their foolhardy action. Having (dishonourably) fired the first shot and nearly killed the Métis spokesman, Semple's grenadiers are slaughtered ("Il s'est bien fait tuer / Quantité de grenadiers / J'avons tué presque tout' son armée"). Falcon portrays the few remaining individuals as a ridiculous mob fleeing the Bois-Brûlés: "Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglais / Et tous ces Bois-Brûlés après / De butte and butte les Anglais culbutaient / Les Bois-Brûlés jetaient des cris de joie." The rapid switch between the English and the Métis as the object of focus in alternating lines brings the action to its climax and leads to the triumphant last line: "Chantons la gloire de tous les Bois-Brûlés."

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[26] An 1884 petition to the government, for example, notes in the first item that the Indians are "reduced," or destitute, suggesting that the government is not upholding its promises to provide rations to Indians who took treaty; all of the other items cover grievances with respect to land grants to Halfbreeds and settlers and self-government for the North-West Territories (present-day prairie provinces) (Bowsfield 108-10).

It should be noted that two variants of the last line suggest a different scope for the sense of victory and glory the song conveys. In the version shown here, the glory is that of *all* Bois-Brûlés. In the variant published by Henri de Lamothe, listeners are exhorted to sing "la gloire de tous *ces* Bois-Brûlés" (309, emphasis added), that is, that of the men who participated in the skirmish. Whether Falcon intended to write a Métis anthem or merely to commemorate the feat of a particular group of men, his song was destined to become one, not least because as a catchy oral composition that could be used as a work song, it was easily remembered, repeated, and transmitted. Writing some sixty years later, Henri de Lamothe refers to the song as "la ballade qui se chante encore sur les canots et dans les expéditions de chasse" (308). The enduring popularity of the song shows that it struck a nerve amongst the Métis, capturing a quality that they recognized and valued in themselves. Regardless of the version in question, Falcon's song ties Métis identity at once to place ("not' pays"), character (courage, honour), and the sort of mental and physical prowess required to gain the upper hand in a quickly-developing skirmish and rout the enemy.

Falcon's song focuses on military feats, and thus on Métis men as the centre of Métis power, thereby contributing to the emergence of a male-oriented discourse of the Métis nation destined to predominate at a time when politics, economics, and public life in general were dominated by men (including amongst Native groups that, even if they had been matriarchal prior to contact, had been subject to patriarchal European influences for centuries). For Falcon, as for Riel, being Métis was not inconsistent with adopting those aspects of European culture that were a natural part of their upbringing and milieu.

Even when Louis Riel writes a poem supposedly reflecting the views of a Métis woman, it becomes yet another paean to the political and military activity of Métis men.

"La Métisse" (1870), written shortly after the success of the Red River resistance, when the Métis had won the right to negotiate the entry of Manitoba into Confederation as a province, shows Riel in a triumphant mood. The poem begins with a statement of pride by the unnamed Métis girl of the title: "Je suis métisse et je suis orgueilleuse / D'appartenir à cette nation" (4: 88). This notion of the individual pride that flows from feeling that one belongs to a "nation" is followed by an idea that is central to Riel's notion of Métis legitimacy, the idea that God creates each nation: "Je sais que Dieu de sa main généreuse / Fait chaque peuple avec attention" (4: 88). The point is not just that the Métis are a Christian nation, but also that they exist by divine right. According to the logic of his religious beliefs, Riel need not make a political or anthropological argument for why the Métis exist as a nation. He need only observe the existence of a distinct people – the "new nation" of the Métis – from which it follows that God has made it so. Divine authenticity being higher than any worldly authority, no one can dispute the legitimacy of the Métis nation.

There is an important distinction to be noted here between Riel's view of the Métis and that of Falcon, which does not incorporate any Christian imagery or ideology in connection with the Métis claims or identity expressed in his "Chanson." This difference reflects the significance for the Métis of the arrival of priests from the (French Catholic) Oblate order in the mid-nineteenth century. Riel's own ideas are indicative of the fundamental influence of Catholicism on Métis identity.[27] He incorporates the process of métissage as a source of national identity into a worldview in which God (in the New World at least) is still engaged in the work of creation. The Métis are "un petit peuple encore" because only recently created, but Riel believes that they have a great destiny, a sign of which is their achievement in winning the right to negotiate their entry into the Canadian Confederation as a province. Even the enmity of others is a sign that they are fulfilling the role of shaking up the old established order of things: "Être haïs comme ils sont les honore / Ils ont déjà rempli de grands destins" (4: 88).

The second verse refers to the Métis military victory in disarming "Schultz [et] sa phalange" (4: 88), that is, the party of Canadians led by John Christian Schultz, who were preparing for an armed attack on the Métis. On December 7, 1869, Riel and his troops captured them and imprisoned them at Fort Garry (Stanley, *Birth* 83-84). Riel then uses both personification of nature and a religious simile to indicate that all of nature and heaven are on the side of the Métis: "Le sept Décembre au soir il fit bien beau / Notre soleil couchant, beau comme un ange / Veillant sur nous, retira son flambeau / Seulement quand Shultz eut rendu les armes" (4: 88). The stanza ends with an image that encapsulates Riel's vision of the Métis as an army fulfilling a religious mission: "Le huit

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[27] Natalie Kermoal points out that "le degré de dévotion de la famille Riel ne représente pas celui de toutes les familles métisses" (79), but her discussion of Catholic practices and institutions of the Franco-Métis (180-201) demonstrates that it was fundamental to their culture. Writing of the Métis of Mackinac (in present-day Michigan), Keith Widder describes their faith in these terms: "[M]ost of the Métis in the fur-trade society [...] clung to what might be termed 'folk Catholicism.' Although Catholic tradition and practices formed a fundamental element of their lives and in their perceptions of themselves, years of spiritual complacency had resulted in many Métis adopting a casual attitude toward the church's teachings [...]. But Catholicism, in some form at least, remained an integral part of Métis identity when they confronted Americans intent on radically transforming them and their society" (65).

Décembre, entouré de ses charmes / Vit les Métis triompher à genoux" (4: 88). The worldly triumph of this Métis in capturing Schultz and his men is perfected at the moment when, on their knees, they offer it up to God.

Again in the last stanza, the Métis are represented by "un saint pasteur, un prêtre inébranlable" (Father Noël Ritchot, one of the delegates sent to Ottawa to negotiate the Manitoba Act), who faces dire difficulties but with God's help returns "avec notre Province" (4: 89). Riel ends the poem on a sour note, but still a triumphal one, by reverting to one of the other villains of the affair. He refers to William McDougall, the governor whose premature arrival at the border of Rupert's Land sparked the crisis that became the Red River resistance. Here McDougall, and the vague reference to "tous ses mauvais plans" (4: 89) stands in for the government in Ottawa in general and its designs on Métis country, which at the time when Riel composed the poem seemed to have been successfully forestalled by the Métis.

Like Falcon's song, Riel's poem consecrates and celebrates a Métis victory as a sign of national glory. Significantly, Riel reinforces the male-dominated political and military events by textualizing the approval or admiration of a female speaker. The role of this unnamed "jeune fille" (4: 88) (meaning both young and unmarried) is most evident in the third stanza and the refrain. She is witness to the massed forces of the Métis army at Fort Garry, "huit cent métis dans le fort et la ville" (4: 88) and observes their bravery, pride and devoutness. In the refrain, she pays her highest tribute to the men by declaring that if she were to fall in love, it would be with "un des soldats de la petite armée" (4: 88) – the small, but courageous and victorious Métis army.

Although Riel uses the conceit of a female speaker to create the sense of a nation united, the girl is removed from the vital centre of action. Her role is to watch and admire the men, whose activity is the fundamental guarantor of Métis success. In a message that is congruent with the nineteenth-century European gendered division of labour in nation-building, the men act to "défendre le pays" (4: 88) and "garder leurs foyers" (4: 89), while the women support and admire them, receiving and consecrating their victory.

The poem sets out themes to which Riel would return repeatedly: that the Métis are a little people created by God and possessing a special destiny to fulfill, one that can already be glimpsed in their great achievements. In his Ode to "Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français" (1883), for example Riel begins by evoking the greatness of the Métis people in its victories over the "indiens du Minnesota" and the "tribus du Dakota," an allusion to the battle of the Grand Coteau. Other Métis accomplishments are their wide-ranging travel throughout the North-West (again suggesting ways in which the Métis have developed and controlled their territory), their hospitality in assisting newcomers, and their founding of the province of Manitoba.

In the second part of the poem, Riel notes that the Métis are devout Christians: "Le Métis comprend que l'église / Est Reine à la tête de tout; / Que du ciel étant la commise / Ses œuvres seuls restent debout" (4: 320). Yet this conviction that nothing exists except by God's will does not lead to fatalism. Riel insists in the same section that in addition to divine fiat, the Métis also have "natural law" (4: 320) on their side. He exhorts the Métis to calmly uphold the principles of natural law, even though it is "despised" and "ignored" by others (4: 320) – presumably meaning the Canadian government and its representatives in the West – because "Le droit seul rend la liberté" (4: 320).

The contention that the Métis are not only supported by natural law but indeed are its "port-enseigne" (4: 320) or "standard-bearers" is an important part of Riel's argument for Métis rights. The notion that a universal natural law exists by virtue of the very nature of humankind was first developed in ancient Greece by the Stoics. Because it depends on the existence of human society but not on the existence of an organized state, natural law governs people in the absence of a state, and indeed may justify revolution against an unjust state ("Natural Law").[28] This appears to be the principle that Riel had in mind in 1869 in forming a provisional government once the Hudson's Bay Company had relinquished its *de facto* authority in Rupert's Land. A "Déclaration des habitants de la terre de Rupert et du Nord-Ouest," published in December 1869 by a council of representatives of the French Métis, states that "il est reconnu qu'un peuple qui n'a pas de gouvernement est libre d'adopter une forme de gouvernement plutôt qu'une autre, d'accepter ou de refuser celle qui lui est proposée" (1: 35-36). Fourteen years later, the Métis of the Saskatchewan district were again attempting to assert claims to the land they had settled. In his "Ode," written during the unrest in Saskatchewan, Riel insists that the Métis have the law on their side and that they will prevail by upholding their principles: "Nos bons principes nous font vivre / En dépit de nos assassins. / Le bon droit que nous savons suivre / Vaincra tous les mauvais desseins" (4: 321). The doctrine of natural law was even more congruent with Riel's thinking in that the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas had linked it directly to the functioning of divine law.[29] The ideas that the Métis are a nation created by God as part of his great plan, and that Riel himself is a Métis prophet, fit with Riel's portrait of the Métis as a simple, God-fearing people who are able themselves to recognize and apply the principles of natural law to their own circumstances, and therefore to continue asserting their claims with the certainty of their justification.

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[28] Riel had studied the "cours classique" in Québec, and would therefore have been familiar with the work of such experts on natural law as Thomas Aquinas.

It is clear from the rhetoric of Riel's essay on the Métis and Falcon's foundational song of the new nation, that these authors imagine Métis nationality in masculine terms. These texts focus on attributes that are strongly identified as masculine: military prowess and soldierly courage, decision-making power exerted exclusively by men, and conflicts between groups of men over control of the land. The institutions that Riel describes are designed by and for men. Métis women accompanied the hunt and played an important role in dressing the buffalo carcasses and preparing pemmican (Barkwell 214), but that part of the hunt is usually ignored or obscured in historical accounts, most of which were written by men, and certainly did not factor into Riel's rhetorical appeal to the men in charge of the Canadian government and its agencies.

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[29] According to Aquinas, natural law was an aspect of divine providence. Humans, as rational creatures created by God, participate in and act upon His eternal law: "law, as Aquinas defines it, is a rule of action put into place by one who has care of the community, and as God has care of the entire universe, God's choosing to bring into existence beings who can act freely and in accordance with principles of reason is enough to justify our thinking of those principles of reason as law" ("Natural Law" par. 1.1).

Louis Riel and Métis Ethnic Identity

While we have seen that Louis Riel used such elements as territory, law and European-influenced values to delineate a sense of Métis nationality, he does not refer in the 1885 essay to any of the other elements that were popularly held to be national characteristics, chief among them language and religion. That may be in part because Riel is presenting an argument for fair treatment of the Métis by the Canadian government, but it is also because those elements were more divisive amongst the Métis than they were unifying. Métis identity construction at the time involves two aspects that are often incongruent: the duality of their fundamental definition as individuals with two distinct lines of ancestry, and the singularity of their self-definition as a "nation." The memory of hybrid origins is maintained by the very name "Métis" which, Riel points out, derives from the Latin "mixticus" for "mixed" (3: 278).

As Riel shows when he quickly moves beyond the idea of dual ancestry in describing the Métis, he realizes that hybridity as a defining feature is something that must be overcome in order to build a singular identity. In some ways, the very awareness of that duality runs counter to the need for centripetal forces to create a national consciousness. For Renan, race (meaning the equivalent of our "ethnicity") did not constitute such a force, because "La race [...] est quelque chose qui se fait et se défait." Furthermore, Renan would never have seen métissage as a constitutive national attribute, because it was already a part of every nation: "La conscience instinctive qui a présidé la confection de la carte d'Europe n'a tenu aucun compte de la race, et les premières nations de l'Europe sont des nations de sang essentiellement mélangé" (28). Clearly, with his assumption that nations were mainly a European phenomenon, Renan was not taking into account the new groups in the Americas who laid claim to métissage as an important feature of their identities. Indeed, it was because a standard definition of "nation" did not cover a group such as the Métis that Riel had to work so hard to construct his argument by emphasizing aspects that did meet that definition.

To project a sense of Métis national unity, Riel defines the Métis broadly as any mixed-blood people in the North-West, but in doing so he glosses over some of the most divisive forces at work amongst the French-speaking, Catholic Métis and the English-speaking, Protestant Halfbreeds. When we turn from writings that emphasize Métis nationality to those that portray Riel's more personal ethnic identity, however, we can see that language and religion were two of the attributes that he prized most highly in himself, and therefore attributes that he did not share with the Anglo-Métis. Riel was politically astute in the Red River resistance of 1869-70 in uniting all Métis around their shared interests, but in the North-West resistance of 1885, faced with a much more adverse situation, Riel's reliance on his religious beliefs in particular became a hindrance, since this was a force of division between rather than of unification of the Métis.

There is a great deal of overlap in the notions of "national identity" and "ethnic identity." The overlap is perhaps most obvious in modern-day Québec, which in November 2006 was recognized by Parliament as a nation within Canada (Hansard), and whose distinction from the rest of the country has been maintained largely by inhabiting a bounded territory, speaking a different language and maintaining a distinct culture that, until the *Révolution tranquille*[30] that began in the late 1950s, was largely dominated by the Catholic Church. Because the strong notion of ethnic identity had not yet developed in the nineteenth century, the language available to Riel for stating his people's difference was that of "nation" or "race." When Riel refers to the Métis as a new nation, he means in the first instance that they represent a new mixture of races that has never existed before. The language is confusing precisely because the word "race" in the weak sense of a nation or ethnic group was not distinguished from its stronger biological sense as used by anthropologists developing the new "science" of racial theory (Brantlinger 17-44; Todorov, *On Human* 90-170).[31]

Apart from noting at the beginning of his 1885 essay that mixed race is the basis of Métis existence, Riel does not rely on métissage itself to substantiate Métis nationality, except in oblique ways such as referring to their joint land tenure with the Indians or pointing out that the Métis have always maintained good relations with the Indians after defeating them. In other writings, however, he reveals more detailed thinking on the idea of métissage and in particular on the value he attaches to his French background. This bias is not surprising, given that Riel's parents were both raised within French-Canadian culture, although Riel's father was Métis and the family identified as Métis within Red River society. More importantly, Riel himself was educated first by Oblate priests in Red River and later at a Catholic seminary in Quebec. He had Dene ancestry from his paternal great-grandmother, but his cultural background had more French-Canadian than Native influences.

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[30] The name given to the radical reforms, including the secularization of Québec society, that took place after the death of conservative premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959.

[31] On the current return of the notion of race in Canadian literary criticism, see Coleman and Goellnicht 11-19.

For Riel, this was not problematic: he thought of himself as Métis and was accepted by the Métis not only as one of them but also as their leader. Indeed, it was not the Métis themselves who sought to pinpoint their identity in terms of racial quantum. His statement of pride in dual ancestry remains one of the most potent declarations for the Métis people: "il est juste que nous honorions nos mères aussi bien que nos pères. [...] Pour peu que nous ayons de l'un ou de l'autre la reconnaissance et l'amour filial, ne vous font-ils pas une loi de dire: 'Nous Sommes Métis'" (3: 278-79).

Quite apart from its obvious insistence on racial hybridity, there is a further dimension of the idea of the Métis honouring "our mothers and our fathers" that is crucial to understanding how Métis identity was perceived in the nineteenth century and the major shift that occurred between that perception and the perception of Métis identity in the twentieth century. Riel's phrase succinctly points to the race/gender parallels that underlie colonial métissage: the "mothers" represent the Métis' Indian ancestors and the "fathers" represent their white ancestors. The fundamental racial duality in Métis identity is often manifested in rhetorical terms, then, through a parallel gender duality. As I contend in subsequent chapters, these metaphorical divisions take on more concrete significance in the late twentieth century, when Métis women assume the power to define the Métis and do so with much greater attention to their female ancestors.

Governed by the patriarchal views that went mainly unchallenged in nineteenth-century North America (and certainly in male-dominated fur trade society), and by his own upbringing, Riel identifies more naturally with his French-Canadian side than with his Indian side. Indeed, there is no evidence that he had more than a passing familiarity with any of the Indian cultures of Western Canada, let alone with Dene culture. As is clear from the references to Indian ancestry in his writings, the connection that Riel felt with that ancestry was relatively shallow, compared to the rich intellectual and cultural world that his French-Canadian heritage represented for him. There can be no doubt, in examining Riel's lyric poetry in particular, that culturally he was much more in tune with the culture of the European fathers than of the Indian mothers. In his poem "Le Sang Sauvage en moi rayonne," for example, one might expect a detailed description of the virtues passed down to Riel through his native blood. He begins the poem, however, by referring to his ancestors singing "la Huronne" to him, a song that Glen Campbell surmises must be the "Jesu Ahatonhia" composed by the Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf while evangelizing the Huron (Riel 4: 180, n. 3). The Native ancestry that this evokes is one that has already been affected by French missions to convert the Huron to Christianity – an already-hybrid Nativeness that is congruent with Riel's profound Catholic convictions.

It should be said that the point is not to suggest that there is a right and a wrong way of thinking about one's hybridity, but precisely that a whole complex palette of possibilities exists, any combination of which may be used to construct an identity with which one feels comfortable while still remaining Métis. We need to cultivate a "logique métisse," says anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle (*Logiques* 248), precisely because the fiction (or myth) of "pure" racio-cultural origins has had such disastrous consequences for so many people. Such a logic requires that we learn to think of cultures and races as always already hybrid.

For Riel, the memory and image of the Christian Huron song is sufficient to lay claim to Indian blood. It is unclear what he means by its "radiating" in him (as indicated by the title), except that he credits the experience of hearing the "proud and charming" tune with making a poet of him. It is likely that this is an unfinished piece, and that Riel was contemplating further developments of the metaphor. As the poem now stands, the second stanza seems to contradict the title, in that the French blood referred to is in fact replacing that of the Native people, who have vanished:

> Quoique sur les bords du grand fleuve
> Les tribus aient dû s'effacer,
> Et qu'un Sang fort à toute épreuve
> Un jour ait pu les remplacer;
> Ce qu'il en reste est sans vengeance
> De le céder au nom français:
> Ce nom a toute préséance
> En faisant aimer ses succès. (4: 178-79)

The idea that the remaining Natives are happy to give way to the French blood "replacing" them evokes the idea of French-Indian métissage as a peaceful, natural process in which the "strong" blood of the French prevails over the Indian blood. The construction "aient dû s'effacer" paints a vague picture of a process that takes place naturally and without violence, so that those who have been displaced accept it without feelings of vengeance. The title of the poem is likely intended to inject the understanding into the scenario that the Métis, although they are the offspring of that strong French blood, also contain the Indian blood that was superseded. To express the idea in current terms, the Indian blood that "radiates" in the speaker is the blood quantum that makes him Métis and gives him title to the land. In all other respects, he is effectively French-Canadian.

Having placed his Indian blood in a frame that makes it present but transformed by métissage, Riel goes on to finish the poem with the highest praise for French-Canadians, the side of his double heritage that he favours:

> Le canadien français paisible
> Est léger pour être assez gai.
> Dans ses combats il est terrible
> Comme on le vit à Châteauguay.
> Dès qu'il triomphe dans la guerre
> Il plaint son ennemi brisé.
> De tous les peuples de la terre,
> Ah! C'est le mieux civilisé. (179-80)

This last word holds the key to why Riel believes in the superiority of his French-Canadian heritage: he has accepted that "civilization" is the highest goal of humankind, and that European culture represents the pinnacle of civilization, based on such fundamentals as Christianity, literacy, agriculture, and moral values such as the merciful treatment of a defeated enemy. Clearly, métissage does not automatically break down what Emma LaRocque calls the "civ/sav" binary ("Native Writers" 80), as many positive theories of métissage would have it.

In the second half of his Ode to the "Métis-Canadien-Français," Riel addresses the theme of métissage alluded to in the title through the hyphenation of ethnic components. He begins by stating that the hyphen between "Métis" and "Canadien" makes for an ideal combination, since each "race" (4: 321) has virtues that the other does not. This idea of the complementarity of racial traits that results from racial mixing is one of the main ideas supported by proponents of métissage as an ideal amalgamation of different races. According to Riel, the main virtue of the French Canadians is their strength and firmness when faced with the crushing power of the English. Morally upright and diplomatic, they have long experience in "taming" the English as the "apprivoiseurs d'Albion" (4: 322).

The complementary strength of the Métis is somewhat more enigmatically expressed: "Métis, la grande indifférence / Que nous tenons du sang indien / Se rendant jusques à l'outrance (4: 322). This description seems to suggest that the characteristic of "indifference" (which should more properly be translated as "diffidence") inherited from their Indian side is sometimes taken to an extreme.[32] At the same time, the "finesse" in dealing with enemies, derived from their French-Canadian side, means that the Métis make too many compromises (4: 322). The corrective for this trait, says Riel, is "l'Esprit français" (4: 323), a fortifying tonic bestowed on the Métis by God. It is manifested by a love of positive law, lucid thought and energetic expression, as well as enchanting politeness (4: 323) that instils reason even in "les furibonds" (4: 323).

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[32] This quality may be what Richard Preston describes as self-control, a highly important attribute for the Cree. Though Preston is describing the Eastern Cree, his observations are likely to apply to the Plains Cree and other groups as well: "Speculatively, I think that self-control is unconsciously held as the most appropriate way of coping with an external world that is full of contingencies that are only sometimes predictable, or susceptible of influence. [...] an angry, jealous, or fearful man makes a poor hunter, as would

In closing the poem, Riel uses the image of the three-leafed trillium to represent the happy combination of the three groups united in the Métis, although significantly, he also notes that the work of consolidating those elements into a nation is being done by the clergy, whose "grand coeur prend beaucoup de peine / A consolider, je le sais, / La nation manitobaine / Des Métis-canadiens-français" (4: 325).[33] Although Riel would alienate the clergy in the North-West in 1885 (who did not condone his calls for disobedience to the government and, especially, the Church), his views did not amount to a rejection of Catholicism. Instead, he held a fervent belief that he was the "Prophet of the New World" and that the Métis were destined to renew and reinvigorate the Church in the New World (Martel 176-77; Flanagan 86-90).

During a period of tense relations between French Canadians and Métis in Manitoba,[34] Riel (who was living in exile in Montana at the time) wrote a letter to his Métis friend Pierre Lavallée listing the strengths and weaknesses of both peoples and asking him to reconcile the groups by getting each of them to imitate the other's positive

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an ecstatic, romantic, or foolhardy individual. I do not claim that these emotions are not present for the Eastern Cree, but they are not manifested as overt, focused emotional behaviour" (235).

[33] This sentiment echoes Henri Lamothe's comments on Monseigneur Taché, the Bishop of St. Boniface: "Si notre nationaltité représentée par douze ou quinze mille métis, hier encore sans cohésion, sans instruction, sans vues d'avenir, parvient à se maintenir entre la rivière Winnipeg et les Montagnes-Rocheuses, l'histoire dira sans doute un jour dans quelle large mesure l'archevêque de Saint-Boniface aura contribué à ce résultat" (266).

[34] See Painchaud.

qualities: "Faites voir aux canadiens français ce qu'il leur importe d'imiter dans les métis, et faites voir à ceux-ci ce qu'il leur importe d'imiter dans les canadiens français" (2: 301). He describes the Métis as more devout, more charitable, more modest and more honest than the French Canadians. They face adversity with greater patience, live closer to nature, and are quicker to pardon insults. French Canadians are more knowledgeable and experienced, harder working, and more thrifty. Riel may intend a mild criticism when he asserts that physically, in addition to having a light skin tone, they are better dressed, better housed, better fed – in a word, "plus riches" than the Métis (298).

Riel's suggestion that the French Canadians and Métis can find qualities worthy of imitation in each other offers an important clue to the ways in which Riel's own consciousness of métissage has given rise to a métis logic. In the nineteenth century, a period when national identities were becoming reified through the discourse of national characteristics or stereotypes (Leerssen), Riel insists on the malleability of different nationalities (or ethnicities). He does not consider these attributes the unchanging essences of two peoples, but qualities that can be acquired voluntarily once their value is recognized. The most potent part of this métis logic is not the process by which such transfers take place, perhaps, but the moral value that Riel attaches to the process of métissage as a means of improving human beings.

As we have seen from numerous other instances, however, Riel does not reject the idea of ethnic or national or racial essences altogether. That is because, again, the assumption that *all* qualities are transferable through mere cultural contact would void the important factor of Indian blood as the basis of indigeneity and land title. In his 1885 essay, Riel addresses the question of blood quantum through an oblique reference to personal experience. To someone who might suggest that a light-skinned Métis person could easily pass as a white man, Riel replies that the Métis derive their very identity from both sides of their ancestry and therefore, "Pourquoi nous occuperions-nous à quel degré de mélange nous possédons le sang européen et le sang indien?" (3: 278-79). He implies that the mere presence of the mix, and pride in the mix, is enough to make a person Métis. Riel may be responding here to his meeting with Henri Lamothe in 1873 and Lamothe's description of Riel in the published account of his travels through Canada: "J'ai dit que Louis Riel avait une figure intelligente, ouverte et sympathique; il ne coule dans ses veines qu'un seizième de sang indien, aussi, à moins d'être prévenu d'avance, ne devinerait-on jamais en lui un métis" (272-73).[35] Riel rejects the idea that some sort of blood quantum consideration is relevant in determining who is Métis. He asserts that a mixed heritage of any degree and a desire to acknowledge both sides of that heritage are sufficient conditions for identifying as Métis.

It is important to note that Riel is suggesting here that there is a fundamental biological understanding of the Métis. Some degree of Indian/Euro-Canadian racial mixture is one component. Although biologists have long since refuted the notion that racial differences have any reality in biological terms, the idea of descent from Aboriginal peoples is crucial for both Indians and Métis because it forms the basis for Native title and claims against the colonial state. Moreover, as research on race and métissage has shown, the phenotypical distinctions that we learn to think of as racial markers have far-reaching social and political consequences despite their biological insignificance (Bonniol and Benoist). For his part, Riel emphasizes that being Métis is not just a matter of descent. A mixed Indian and European heritage must also be accompanied by a moral attitude: pride in both sides of one's ancestry and consequently rejection of the opprobrium that others might attach to racial mixing.

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[35] The editors of Riel's *Collected Works* report that Riel was one-eighth Indian, through his paternal great-grandmother, a Montagnais-Chipewyan (Dene) woman (4: 180, n. 2).

In addition to racial mixture and pride in mixed ancestry, the definition of Métis includes a cultural or collective component that is distinct from Indian and European cultures and is sustained by a Métis community (a *sine qua non* of cultural survival). The current definition of Métis by the Métis National Council states that "Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation." It further stipulates that the "'Historic Métis Nation means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland" ("National Definition"). This contemporary official definition of Métis avoids the question of race or métissage by invoking the Métis Nation as already defined by Riel and his Métis community in the nineteenth century. That original nation forms the foundation or already-mixed origin of subsequent generations of Métis.

By refusing to open up the definition of "Métis" to what would be a contentious discussion of its specific contents, the Métis National Council wisely chooses to adhere to the process of forgetting that is required to maintain national consciousness. As Renan pointed out in 1882, historians and their dredging up of inconvenient details or inconsistencies from the past are inimical to the national project: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger." In particular, because "L'unité se fait toujours brutalement," historical studies are anti-national insofar as they focus attention on the violence that lies behind every political formation (21).

Instead of historical detail, then, through a combined process of forgetting and storytelling, nations are built on myths. According to Édouard Glissant, these myths are particularly powerful in what he calls *cultures ataviques*, which "conçoivent l'être comme uniment relié à une communauté, elle-même uniment reliée à une sorte de vocation primordiale, en général signifiée et illustrée par un mythe de création du monde, par une genèse" ("Métissage et créolisation" 47). The mixed origins of the Métis are problematic insofar as the myths of their ancestors on both sides are based on a myth of (singular) genesis. The myth of a singular origin in turn leads to the idealization of an imagined purity of races, ethnic groups, or cultures.

Clearly, to imagine the Métis as a "new nation" required that these ideological problems be overcome. In a sense, Riel deals with it by encompassing both possibilities: the Métis have at once a *dual* origin and a *singular* identity. Though Riel indirectly raises the spectre of anti-Indian prejudice in white society as something that could impinge on Métis people, the gist of his 1885 essay is that the Métis form a new, sovereign nation separate from Indian nations in the North-West and have developed their own traditions and forms of political organization. Riel's vision of a Métis future shows that from a

Métis-centred point of view, métissage is the norm rather than a marginal side-effect of racial contact. Once under way on a large scale, métissage leads to the disappearance of the original races and becomes a process of continuous endogamous miscegenation, just as had happened with the Métis themselves. Riel was already expounding a sort of métis logic a century before Amselle.

Middle Ground and Contact Zone

The idea of métissage as a norm would appear to be natural from a Métis-centric point of view like Riel's. The development of pre-Confederation Métis consciousness was a consequence of the fact that the fur trade created conditions in which métissage took place over a long period at a significant distance from the metropolitan centres of Montreal and London. As historians began to realize in the early 1980s, the process of métissage was aided in Canada by the particular context of contact in which it arose.

The specific site of métissage that gave rise to the Métis nation has come to be known as the "middle ground." This phrase was coined by historian Richard White to refer to a space of non-coercive métissage. It is a space where "diverse peoples adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings. People try to persuade others who are different from themselves by appealing to what they perceive to be the values and the practices of those others. They often misinterpret and distort both the values and practices of those they deal with, but from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices"

(*Middle Ground* x).[36] The most significant aspect of the middle ground is that it is characterized by a power equilibrium between the groups in contact, rather than outright domination of one side by the other: "The middle ground depended on the inability of both sides to gain their ends through force. The middle ground grew according to the need of people to find a means, other than force, to gain the cooperation or consent of foreigners. To succeed, those who operated on the middle ground had, of necessity, to attempt to understand the world and the reasoning of others and to assimilate enough of that reasoning to put it to their own purposes" (52). In this space, reciprocal attention to the desires and needs of the other, even if it sometimes leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, drives a productive dialogical process of cultural interaction. The moral and ethical basis of this métissage makes it quite different from métissage that takes place in a context of oppression.

In contrast, the ground of métissage in North America (and in most other colonial regimes) is usually understood as a "contact zone." This phrase was first used by Mary Louise Pratt to refer to "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (*Imperial* 6). It has since been widely adopted in postcolonial cultural studies which, in most cases, deal with métissages that have occurred in those conditions.

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[36] Vol. 63, Issue 1 (2006) of *The William and Mary Quarterly* is dedicated to a discussion and critique of White's notion of the middle ground and its impact on historical studies of contact and métissage in the Great Lakes region.

Both phrases describe a situation of (imperial or colonial) contact, but they differ in the power relations between the groups in contact. Because a contact zone is an area of unequal power, it is usually seen as a place of little or no agency for the Native people in general, and the Native women in particular, who were involved in relationships with white men. In contrast, the middle ground of the Canadian fur trade was a place in which both sides involved in the contact benefited from the interaction and participated in maintaining it. While it must be acknowledged that "Force and violence are hardly foreign to the process of creating and maintaining a middle ground," the most important point is that "the critical element is mediation" (R. White, "Creative" 9).

The distinction between these two conceptions of contact is important because they affect our attitude toward the fundamental moral value of métissage. If we assume that métissage has taken place in a context of extreme power imbalance, then it follows that the imbalance is found not only in the power of the white and Native sides, but also between the men and women involved in métissage. Consequently, Indian women have had little or no choice in the matter and must be seen as at best severely disempowered participants and at worst victims of rape and violence. That is the conclusion, for example, that Robert Young reaches in studying racial hybridity in colonial regimes against the background of nineteenth-century racial theory. Because he assumes that a subaltern woman participates in métissage only through her (biological) reproductive abilities and only as a result of coercion or rape, Young concludes that she "only becomes a productive agent through an act of colonial violation" (19).

That statement is based on two major assumptions of English postcolonial theory, which developed mainly through study of colonialism in India and South-East Asia: firstly, that woman are always in a subaltern position, which is untrue for North American Native women both before and after contact in the middle ground,[37] and as a corollary, that interracial sex always amounts to violation and never to rational choice. Again, that assumption is not generally true in the middle ground or in Western Canada, where Native women often did have a choice and had good reasons to choose European husbands, including their desire to benefit the community, a major motivating factor for Indian individuals (Havard 642-45; Devine, *People* 81, 106-07). To speak of métissage as a phenomenon of the middle ground, then, is to emphasize the relative power equilibrium of the groups in contact and the agency of the Native women entering mixed marriages, and thus to attach a moral value to métissage that rejects the generalized sense of shame and abhorrence with which mixed race has often been associated.

The idea of métissage as a contact zone phenomenon underpins the idea of a "civ/sav" binary and the interpretation of Indian (and Métis) representations as rigid stereotypes. A contact zone of unequal power provides the context in which one side can gain hegemonic discursive control over the other – that is, the sort of control required to establish stereotypes and inculcate them so thoroughly in a society that the group subject to the stereotypes must constantly contend with them and may even come to believe them in cases of "infiltrated consciousness."[38] The notions of middle ground and contact zone are both relevant to Métis history and the distinctions between them can help understand differences in representations of Métis. In effect, the pre-1885 Métis belong to the middle ground, while after 1885, Western Canada becomes a contact zone for the Métis, with the balance of power tipped rapidly and irrevocably toward Euro-Canadian domination.

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[37] Writing of early contact in the Western Great Lakes, Susan Sleeper-Smith argues that Native women played an important role in "establishing the fur trade as an avenue of sociocultural change" in that "Native women who married fur traders not only mediated the exchange of furs for trade goods but often used their

Riel's description of Métis practices, characteristics and values in the nineteenth century shows that he accepts the current view propounded by European thinkers that human groups are either "civilized" or "primitive." What is confounding about this thinking is that what appears to be a simple binary turns out to be a slippery continuum that can as easily be used against the Métis as in their favour. Riel's description of the Métis associates them with the "civilized" side of the binary, but he argues that the Métis are distinguished by their friendly relations with and benevolent treatment of the Indians. He states that "Avant la Confédération,[39] les Métis par leur supériorité sur les tribus indiennes les dominaient mais sans aucun abus de force" (3: 281). The harmonious relations between the Métis and the Indians make the Métis their natural "civilizers": "Les rapports humains et doux qu'ils [the Métis] avaient avec elles [the Indian tribes] les

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intermediary role and their access to trade goods to augment their own authority and that of their households" (5).

[38] I use this term from Hilde Lindemann Nelson in preference to "internalized racism," which has become a cliché. Infiltrated consciousness is defined as a state in which oppressed groups "come to see themselves in the terms reserved by the oppressive institutions of their society for people like them" (21) and is one of the constituents of "damaged identities" that Nelson suggests can be repaired through resistant narratives.

[39] This is referring to the Confederation of 1870, when Manitoba joined Canada as a province. The rest of Rupert's Land was transferred to Canada by the HBC and, as the North-West Territories, was under federal jurisdiction.

civilisaient plus ou moins" (3: 274). According to this view, the Métis act as an indigenous, and therefore a legitimate, colonizing force.

When expressed by non-Native individuals, such ideas are easily condemned: "The idea of an abstract Civilization 'inevitably' winning over Savagery neatly served the White North American 'usurper.' Everything the Whiteman did was legitimized by 'civilization' and everything Indians did was explained by their supposed 'savagery'" (LaRocque, "Native Writers" 90). This binary formulation of the relations between Natives and newcomers is problematic when applied to the Métis: were they usurpers or usurped, victims or perpetrators of colonial domination? Clearly, Riel is outlining the notion of the Métis as political and cultural brokers who have played a unique role in the relations between Europeans and Indians in the North-West. That role can be seen as an extension of the "go-between" figure that Stephen Greenblatt sees as central to the whole encounter between the New World and the Old (139-45) and the "vast process of cultural translation" that encounter initiated (145). Indeed, the mixed-blood person might be seen as the ideal go-between as long as the balance of power and interests does not favour one side of her ancestry over the other. Such a position may be deemed a strength from a Métis-centric point of view and while such an equilibrium prevails, but the very sympathy between Métis and their Indians relations could also arouse suspicions on the part of European colonizers because the Métis are people "whose ambiguous positioning and identifications could make them either dangerous adversaries or effective partisans of the colonial state" (Coombes and Brah 3). This sort of mobile positioning had disastrous consequences for the Métis after the 1885 resistance, when attempts to force a hearing of the Métis' justified complaints and demands would instead be portrayed and widely understood as treason.

Riel's description of the Métis and expressions of his own Métis identity reflect the middle-ground moral value of métissage as a natural – and indeed, in his view, an ideal – outcome of contact. This attitude falls under what Young calls the "amalgamation thesis" of nineteenth-century race theory: "the claim that all humans can interbreed prolifically and in an unlimited way; sometimes accompanied by the 'melting-pot' notion that the mixing of people produces a new mixed race, with merged but distinct new physical and moral characteristics" (18). It should be noted here that the idea of the "melting pot" was often a cover for assumptions that Native groups would inevitably be whitened through métissage. In a paper presented to the Royal Society of Canada in 1885, for example, John Reade argues exhaustively that métissage is the outcome of virtually every human endeavour in history, including conquests and forced population movements, trade, exploration, missionary work, and so on. Mixed populations are present everywhere, and the process of mixing is constantly at work: "The change is imperceptible. The half-breed comes and disappears, and with him nations of men seem to pass out of existence. But they have merely been absorbed and by absorption helped to transform others" (21). Reade condemns the racist views of those who abhor métissage, stating that "I look for the day when race peculiarities shall be terminated, when the unity of the race shall be manifested. [...] Centuries hence, the red man, the yellow man, the white and the black may all have ceased to exist as such, and in America be found the race combining the bloods of them all" (14). His praise of the mingling of blood does not, however, extend to the mingling of cultures, when he states that "the aboriginal element has been largely absorbed by the European settlers in the United States as in Canada [...]. Some of the best families in Virginia and the other States have had Indian ancestors" (14). Although Reade appears to be saying, like Riel, that métissage will eventually lead to a Métis population, for Reade that population will inevitably have a Western culture that has been changed – but not changed in any fundamental way – through the mixing, or rather the absorption, of "blood."

With only a slight adjustment in point of view, amalgamation can be construed as a negative rather than a positive process. Some scientists (of whom Arthur de Gobineau is the best known) held that racial mixing produces "a mongrel group that makes up a 'raceless chaos', merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact" (18). This sort of thinking is what lay behind government policies and social policing aimed at separating the races to prevent métissage from occurring, either through laws prohibiting mixed marriages or severe social sanctions against interracial sexual liaisons and the offspring of such relationships.

The two forms of the amalgamation thesis may have appeared diametrically opposed in the nineteenth century, one virulently racist, the other anti-racist. It is clear from Reade's paper, however, that the "positive" amalgamation thesis still affirms a sort of cultural racism by assuming that Western culture is superior and that the proper end point of métissage is a mixed population that has been absorbed for all intents and purposes into that Western culture. It defuses the bite of ideas about racial purity by suggesting that métissage is a means of arriving at a population that is highly mixed biologically but unmixed culturally. If it has changed, the changes are minor and unthreatening.

The problem of cultural absorption is something that faces every mixedblood group. If a certain amount of absorption is "natural" for any mixedblood population as children meld into the group with which they are socialized, then at what point does absorption become a form of discursive or cultural violence against the Métis? As we have seen from his poem "Les Métis-Canadien-français," Riel adopts a positive form of this thesis by holding that the Métis combine the virtues of both their Indian and European or French-Canadian ancestries. Nevertheless, the discrepancies between the virtues he describes in his two ancestries reveal that he is not immune to the pitfalls of the newly influential racial theories of the nineteenth century.

Attuned to his European side through his upbringing and education, Riel saw no contradiction between the idea of Métisness as having a mixed heritage and also accepting European cultural influences (language, religion, social and political structures such as marriage by priests or elections as a means of choosing representatives) as an integral part of the Métis world. That is, the recognition of a core of *hybrid consciousness* as a safeguard against assimilation allows for great latitude in the scope for transcultural influence without speaking of full-scale assimilation. Over the years, this has meant that the notion of "Métis" has been a powerful way in which people with a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences can claim a Métis identity as a way of acknowledging (and sometimes respecting) their Indian and white ancestries alike.

The history of the Métis after 1885 is in large part the story of how that hybrid consciousness was denigrated, forgotten, and revived in a new guise. It is about the difficulty of identifying as Métis, the pressures to become absorbed into either Indian or white society, and the long process of re-establishing and reclaiming a distinct identity. The history of Métis representation in Canadian literature reveals the ways in which Canadian beliefs and values around métissage impinged on and shaped the process of reclaiming Métis identities following that devastating disavowal. It is a movement out of the abrupt and often hostile imaginary space of an unequal and violent contact zone back to a more equitable middle ground based on a reciprocal desire for understanding.

The period after 1885 was one of overwhelming political and social marginalization of the Métis. As a result, the Métis people lost any discursive power they may have been gaining, primarily through the example of Riel as representative of an incipient Métis intelligentsia. Instead, for the next 80 years, the Métis as a literary figure appears primarily in narratives by non-Métis writers. By the time Métis writers begin to regain discursive control, they have a body of representations to write back to in their efforts to reclaim the authority of self-representation.

As I discuss in the next chapter, white-authored representations of the Métis in the early twentieth century were in some respects influenced by the growing prevalence of thinking that was inimical to métissage, including race theory and eugenics as well as the further development of anthropology. Nevertheless, those representations are not as simplistically stereotypical as (mainly Anglophone) critics would have us think. Although they do not have a stake in métissage itself, the authors who create these representations understand that métissage is a fundamental theme in Western Canadian history, with ramifications for the shape of Canadian society in the present.

CHAPTER II

MÉTISSAGE AS RACIAL TAINT IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the early twentieth century, the Métis nation had ceased to exist as a political and social force in Western Canada or as the basis for a broadly recognized collective identity. From 1870 to 1888, the Manitoba government included Métis representatives, but by 1890 that representation was no longer guaranteed. The English were dominant enough to suppress the use of French as an official language and to remove the right to separate Catholic schools for Francophone communities (Trémaudan 378-84). The Métis elite and nascent intellectual class (whose most prominent and outspoken member, Louis Riel, had been executed in 1885) was for the most part gradually assimilated into white society. The surviving Métis communities developed in marginal spaces, often in the northern parts of the prairie provinces, during "a century-long era when the great majority [of Métis] were landless and impoverished, and lived on the fringes of road allowances" (Carter, *Aboriginal* 157). In Alberta, where the Métis obtained land for colonies, they remained politically marginalized because, unlike their Cree neighbours, they were barred from making representations to the federal government owing to their lack of status under the Indian Act (Driben 153-4).

The socio-economic marginality of the Métis also translated into cultural marginality. Métis culture was passed down in oral and material form within families and small Métis communities scattered across the prairies, but the images of the Métis circulating in the wider Canadian population were produced by non-Métis writers with varied personal experiences of contact with Métis people and views on métissage. The three texts examined in this chapter – *Nipsya*, *Napoléon*, and *The Gaspards of Pine Croft* (the first two in the French and the third in English) – show how métissage continued to resonate in the minority Francophone and majority Anglophone cultures of Western Canada in the decades following 1885. A comparison of these texts, which were written in the first half of the twentieth century, shows that for the French writers, the Métis were not entirely forgotten so much as assumed to be part of the Francophone minority group. In the English text, on the contrary, métissage is seen as a frontier aberration resulting in mixedblood offspring who can only become part of the Canadian polity through assimilation into the white Anglo-Canadian population.

All three authors present what they themselves surely considered sympathetic and realistic accounts of Métis or mixedblood people, but in every case it is possible to see with the benefit of hindsight that their accounts are influenced by underlying racial stereotypes and the resulting inconsistencies of thinking about racial métissage. In some ways, paradoxically, the inconsistency is more glaring in the highly sympathetic French texts than in the more critical English one, which is at least consistent in its paternalistic condescension. The inevitability of overt or covert racial prejudice in representations of the Métis during this period can be attributed to the general acceptance and strengthening of race theories that led to the biologization of race. Ironically, the popular acceptance of racial biology as the foundation for ethnic differences was becoming solidified at the same time that anthropologists, led by Franz Boas, were arguing that culture, not biology, was the fundamental determinant of distinctions between groups (Elliott 4-7, 13-27; Lewis 452-54; Young 50).

The general attitude of Western Francophones toward the Métis in the early twentieth century is represented by the French-born Manitoba historian Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan, who in 1936 wrote a history of the Métis nation in collaboration with the Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph. Although he abhors the weakening of Western Francophones in general, Trémaudan sees the gradual disappearance of Métis distinction as a sign of their successful assimilation into the white (Francophone) population of the West. Assimilation in turn is proof that the Métis are in no way inferior to Euro-Canadians in industriousness or adaptability to progress, so that "Si on ne parle plus beaucoup des Métis, c'est qu'il n'y a plus rien pour les distinguer du reste de la population de langue française de l'Ouest: leurs qualités, leurs succès sont égaux à ceux de leurs compatriotes et s'y trouvent confondus" (386). The only remaining signs of Métis distinction, states Trémaudan, are certain "belles traditions" that parents pass down to their children to ensure that they remember them (386). A number of local Métis societies are dedicated to honouring their ancestors and recalling the great deeds of the past, because "Un peuple qui se souvient de ses ancêtres et ses martyrs, qui respecte son passé," says Trémaudan, "ne peut pas périr" (387). This residual historical consciousness maintained a sense of Métis identity, particularly amongst Francophone Métis, that would play into the Métis revival of the late twentieth century.

Within the broader Anglophone society of Western Canada, Métis people faced pressures to assimilate by muting or forgetting their distinct identity in order to pass as white. This pressure was particularly intense in the years after 1885, when Anglo-Canadians viewed the Métis as agitators and trouble-makers (Carter, *Aboriginal* 161-62) and "it increasingly became a social and economic liability in the West to be of mixed ancestry" (157). Despite the fact that métissage took place in the British fur trade under the Hudson's Bay Company, the sense of aboriginality that some Western Francophones derived from the Métis part of their community was not shared by Anglophones, who were shaped more profoundly by the subsequent arrival en masse of British settlers and were absorbed into an imagined nationhood that emphasized British roots and obscured any Native ancestry.

In contrast to the Anglophone majority, the Francophone minority on the prairies affirmed the presence of its Métis element as a guarantor of indigeneity – at least symbolic if not literal. Anne-Sophie Marchand asserts that "l'identité franco-manitobaine possède, à la fois, de profondes racines dans le sol manitobaine, et ce, grâce aux voyageurs et à leurs descendants, les Métis, qui ont façonné cette identité dans la conscience des francophones" (35). The same is also true of the Fransaskois and Franco-Albertans. Although, as Diane Payment notes, relations between Franco-Métis and French-speaking European settlers were not always harmonious, a fact that contributed to the Anglicization of the Métis (61, 78-79), the Métis component of the Western French-Canadian identity was accepted over the course of the twentieth century, although it was not always highly valued. That recognition is reflected in the ubiquity of Métis characters (though often in marginalized positions) in Western Francophone literature.

Despite their generally more favourable view of the Métis and willingness to accept them as part of their community, French Canadians share with English Canadians some of their attitudes about the racial status of the Métis. Race theory must inevitably deal with the question of racial mixing, since métissage complicates any notion of racial definitions based on purity. In literary terms, race thinking is manifested in terms of how racial mixing itself is understood to affect individual character. A fundamental distinction made by sociologist Pierre-André Taguieff helps elucidate some of the differences in how the Métis are portrayed. Broadly speaking, says Taguieff, these attitudes follow two main orientations: a "racist orientation" and a "eugenicist orientation." A racist orientation sees the taint as a "stain" (as "impurity, soiling, shattered identity" (226) whereas a eugenicist orientation sees it as a "flaw" ("inferiority, feebleness, subhumanity" (226). The eugenicist view allows for improvement of the mixedblood (through education, religious conversion, or the halting of métissage and subsequent "whitening" of bloodlines), while the racist view sees the "stain" as an essential, permanent trait of the mixedblood.

Broadly speaking, these views coincide with the early views of métissage outlined first by Cornelius de Pauw (1739-1799) and subsequently by Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882). According to de Pauw, the effects of racial métissage would be lost over the course of some five generations as the "stronger" (white) race overcame inferior racial strains; for Gobineau, métissage was the final cause of degeneration in human groups and was to be avoided at all costs (Audinet 79-83). Clearly, both approaches to métissage fit into what can be more broadly characterized as a racist attitude, since in either case one side of the mixed ancestry is considered negative – an inheritance that may or may not be overcome, but that is always deemed inferior. Gobineau's ideas remained a part of the dominant ideology of race in Western societies well into the twentieth century. They were adopted by the Nazi and apartheid regimes, thus demonstrating their danger and ultimate bankruptcy (Audinet 83). Despite the work of anthropologists to move away from a biology-based and toward a culture-based understanding of human and social behaviour, a popular belief persisted that tended to biologize character traits and behaviour, and especially those attributed to the "other" ancestry of a mixedblood person. Portraits of mixed-race characters point up this ideology particularly well in instances where a character's positive behaviour, assumed to be either inherited through white ancestry or more often learned from contact with white people, is suddenly undermined by negative or destructive actions attributed to their Indian blood.

The three novels examined in this chapter exemplify the differences between Francophone and Anglophone approaches to Métis hybridity both historically and ideologically, as well as important points of intersection. Georges Bugnet and Maurice Constantin-Weyer acknowledge the connection created by the hybrid roots of the Métis, a connection that results in a more sympathetic portrayal of their Métis subjects than is found in the English-Canadian novel. Ralph Connor (the pseudonym of Charles William Gordon), in contrast, writes a narrative of containment and appropriation of hybridity for the purposes of colonial control and expansion. At the same time, both Bugnet and Connor adopt a eugenicist approach to métissage, although with different views of what form assimilation should take. Constantin-Weyer praises his hero for improving himself to the point where he is seen as an equal by members of the white community, but then ends his story in tragedy, indicating that a taint remains – whether fundamentally racial or social is unclear – that, at least in literary terms, makes the Métis a tragic figure.

Bugnet and Constantin-Weyer, both immigrants to Western Canada from France, occupy somewhat different positions in relation to their subjects. Bugnet, who immigrated to Alberta in 1905, remained in Canada for the rest of his life. As a young man, he had begun to study for the priesthood, but left the seminary after three years (Papen 19-21). He remained a devout Catholic who believed in the importance of examining one's personal beliefs as a prerequisite for living a good life, an attitude that is reflected in his novel *Nipsya*, his second published novel but the first set entirely in Alberta. The education of his Métis protagonist mainly involves a spiritual education into Christianity through personal rather than institutional instruction. Since the book-buying Francophone population of the West was relatively modest at the time and Francophone writers had to publish either in Quebec or France, Bugnet was necessarily writing for an audience that was unfamiliar with his subject. As I discuss in greater detail below, their audience's general lack of familiarity with a lived experience of métissage is what made it possible for these authors to recuperate the theme for their own ideological and literary purposes.

Constantin-Weyer, who immigrated to Manitoba in 1904 but returned to France in 1914 (leaving behind a Métis wife), was also writing for a French audience far from Western Canada. He used his experience as an immigrant to write frontier adventure stories in which Métis figure as simple, colourful, earthy characters. The author uses that earthiness as license to include scenes and dialogue that are much saltier than the refined conventions of metropolitan French literature allowed. Manitoba critic Donatien Frémont complained bitterly that Constantin-Weyer portrayed the Métis "tels qu'ils ne sont pas" (46), taking advantage of his audience's distance and credulity to describe "des scènes de débauche" and "des détails dont la vulgarité et la platitude seraient flagrantes pour tous, s'ils avaient pour théâtre un quelconque chef-lieu voisin" (47). This early concern about the realism of Métis representations – how Métis people should properly be interpreted and portrayed as characters – introduces what has become a constant questioning in literary criticism about representations of ethnicity in general. Like many authors writing in North America for distant and unknowledgeable audiences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Constantin-Weyer makes implicit claims to firsthand knowledge of his subject matter in order to convince his readers that a concrete referent underpins his representations. His use of a pseudo-autobiographical voice and a partially ethnographic style is aimed at creating a sense of textual verisimilitude.

Writing in a mode that is a combination of romance and realism, Bugnet and Constantin-Weyer create narratives with Métis themes to portray Western Canada from a novel point of view. Where pioneer literature usually features stories of immigrants struggling first to survive in a new land and then to understand it and belong to it, these are stories of a different kind of struggle, one in which Métis people who are already here try to fit into the new society forming around them. The idea that the Métis had to find a way to "fit in" to a rapidly changing society suggests, as early historians contended, that they were a conservative and primitive people who had tried and failed to halt the inevitable modernization of Western Canada and had been unable to adapt to the changes wrought by the arrival of a modern economy (Giraud 1095, 1173; Stanley, *Birth* vii-viii). This view has been challenged in recent years with studies that emphasize the existence of a proto-bourgeoisie amongst the Métis of Red River (Ens 72-80; Payment, "*Free People*" 212-25) and the early development of a complex economy involving agriculture and mercantile activity as well as hunting and fishing. In addition, further research on the conditions of settlement and modernization in the West has demonstrated that they were not determined by some natural socio-economic process, but instead were orchestrated by the government and Euro-Canadian newcomers in a manner calculated to disadvantage the Indigenous inhabitants. Given the market conditions maintained by the fur trade, the Métis had been barred from developing their farms owing to a lack of capital for livestock and implements and a lack of access to markets (Riel 3: 156, 281; Sprenger).

Before the reassessment that began in the 1980s, however, the dominant historical interpretation was that the Métis had been incapable of adapting to modernity after 1885. This was precisely the idea that underpinned the enduring myth of the "vanishing Indian," according to which Native peoples were inevitably destined to disappear when confronted with the more advanced civilization introduced by Europeans. Ironically, purportedly positive views of métissage did exist, based on the notion that it would function as a benign alternative to the complete disappearance of Indigenous peoples.[40] This was a way of balancing admiration for, and acceptance of, useful and valued aspects of European culture without denigrating or erasing the Indian heritage of the Métis.

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[40] Brantlinger cites, for example, Charles Wentworth Dilke's assertion (made in 1869) that once race mixing had proceeded far enough, no "Red Indians" would remain (6).

Nipsya: Métis Liminality

In many ways, Bugnet's métissage plot in *Nipsya* fits with Riel's view of the Métis as an intermediate race that naturally accepts the values of Christianity and an agricultural economy while remaining an Indigenous – and Francophone – presence in the West. The story is structured around a young half-Cree, half-Irish girl whose parents abandoned her in infancy to be raised by her Cree grandmother. At the opening of the novel, Nipsya has reached the verge of womanhood. Her three potential suitors are a young Cree man, Mahigan, the Scottish Hudson's Bay Company factor Alec, and her Métis cousin Vital Lajeunesse. Their interactions provide the pretext for an evaluation of the different cultures and ethnic traits of the three men.

Though not a historical novel *per se*, *Nipsya* takes place during the historically significant year of 1884-1885. The novel's characters form a compendium of fur trade and early settlement types. Nipsya's personal and religious crises play out against the background of broader social change: the transition from a mercantile to an agricultural economy, and from a Francophone to an Anglophone-dominated West. The four main elements of this historical society coincide with four different ethnicities: the two oldest historical groups are represented by Nipsya's Cree grandmother and the young Cree warrior Mahigan, and by Vital's French-Canadian father Cléophas, a voyageur who, like many fur trade employees with Native wives, has remained in the West after leaving the service rather than return to Quebec. Alec represents the British element, while Vital and Nipsya are Métis.

By bringing together this cast of characters and showing how they interact as the narrative progresses, Bugnet expresses his views on the dangers and ideals of those interactions. Most significantly, Bugnet portrays the transition from a full-blooded Indian past to a Métis future, suggesting that the Métis will replace the Cree as the Indigenous inhabitants of Western Canada. Furthermore, the absence of both of Nipsya's parents and Vital's mother represents a suppression of originary métissage, suggesting that the time for interracial unions has passed. The novel ends with the ideal pairing of Nipsya with Vital and a vision of endogamous métissage (that is, intermarriage between people who already have mixed blood) as the desirable norm for developing a Métis community.

What makes Nipsya's initial position so precarious, and what makes her transformation into an ideal Métis mate possible, is a quality that is most aptly described as ethnic liminality. The notion of liminality as first developed in anthropology by Arnold van Gennep was used to designate the middle or transitional stage in a rite of passage such as coming of age or marriage. During this liminal period, persons undergoing the rite have separated from the structures and norms of their initial status and have not yet been reassimilated into society with a new status. The time of liminality is therefore one during which an initiate is located outside the social structures that usually govern her behaviour. Victor Turner extended the notion of liminality to various social phenomena in which people are liberated from or stand outside normative social structures. Liminality is therefore "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (*Ritual* 97).

That very novelty is threatening, however, to a society regulated by accepted patterns and categories. According to Mary Douglas, liminal individuals are considered dangerous precisely because of their ambiguous status. Ambiguity (in this case, the racial ambiguity of the mixedblood individual) and anomaly (the existence of the mixedblood person in a society based on normative Indian/white categories) constitute "uncleanness" that must then be cleansed either through ritual or through an adjustment of the reigning notions of social purity that have been transgressed. Douglas points out that "Purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise" (200). If "purity" in Canadian terms is based on clear-cut racial categories such as "Indian" and "white," literary representations of Métis people are a means of dealing with mixedbloodedness as ambiguous and anomalous. Social cleansing can take place either by "purifying" the category of Métis itself into a separate category (as for example, through the consolidation of a Métis nation) or by erasing it and forcing Métis people to join one of the existing normative categories (as John A. Macdonald insisted they must do after 1885 (Morrison 41).

Between 1885 and 1970, Métis people were generally in a position of social liminality, described by Edward Dutton as "an ambiguous, ill-defined (liminal) situation between two more clearly defined and apparently differing statuses" (par. 4.2). This description applies to the Métis insofar as their ethnicity in the post-1885 period was blurred between the normative categories of "Indian" and "white." The texts under study here are attempts to define and resolve the ethnic liminality of Métis and mixedblood people. For Bugnet, such a resolution is offered by splitting the "white" category into

Anglo-Canadian and Franco-Canadian, and presenting the Franco-Canadian minority norm as appropriate for the Métis.

Nipsya's liminality is indicated in the first instance through her presentation as a malleable young woman in search of new ideas as she comes alive to the world in new ways and "commenc[e] d'entendre en soi-même des appels inconnus et comme un chant de désirs, vague et grandissant" (73). She is a sort of empty vessel ready to be filled with new emotions and ideas. Bugnet introduces Nipsya's mixed racial background as the force that triggers her newly receptive state when she begins to feel the stirrings of a Celtic "hérédité rêveuse" (73) passed on from her Irish father. This reliance on a biological basis for characterization is a continuation of the Enlightenment belief in national character that reached its apogee in the nineteenth century but served well into the twentieth century until it was finally abandoned as nothing more than a set of threadbare caricatures (Leerssen 273-79). As I examine in further detail below, however, the idea of blood-borne characteristics is particularly insidious in that it also provides the basis for racial prejudice against both Indians and Métis in literature when they are depicted as helpless victims of congenital character flaws.

According to Bugnet's presentation of métissage in the young woman, then, Nipsya is open to a learning experience precisely because her mixed blood detaches her from the Cree culture in which she has been raised. Moreover, her proximity to other ideological systems within the frontier world of the fur trade, agricultural settlement and missionary activity makes it possible for Nipsya to question beliefs that would otherwise govern her life. She wonders, for example, "Y avait-il autour d'elle des esprits, les uns bons, prêts à l'aider, les autres sournois et qui lui voulaient du mal? N'y aurait-il qu'un seul grand Esprit qui dirigeait toutes les choses vers le bien, comme l'affirmaient les Blancs?" (75). Bugnet's ethnocentrism is evident when he describes Nipsya as naturally attracted to the white religion, because she "avait de l'attrait pour cette puissance unique." Presumably thanks to her white blood, Nipsya is not always "emprisonnée dans la sensation et le sentiment" (75), qualities that are an integral part of the stereotype of Natives as irrational and ruled by instinct. By suggesting that Cree culture lies very lightly upon Nipsya, and by indicating throughout the novel that Christianity is a more powerful and attractive belief system, Bugnet simplifies his task of showing his heroine's education into Christianity through personal experience with Vital as spiritual guide.

In addition to asserting the inherent attractiveness of Christian ideas, Bugnet relies on a stereotyped characterization of Mahigan as noble savage to eliminate him as Nipsya's suitor. Nipsya is attracted to Mahigan at first by his physical prowess and the power of his political beliefs. She catches her first glimpse of him at the trading post, where he breaks a wild horse and rails against the presence of white men, who have "ruiné les castors" and other game animals, concluding that "Les Blancs sont pires que les gros loups des bois" (79). At a meeting called to discuss whether to join the emerging uprising, Mahigan calls on the Cree and Métis to push out the missionaries, the HBC and white settlers alike (137).

Nipsya's attraction begins to turn to repulsion when Mahigan mutilates himself during a Sun Dance. As Daniel Francis explains, the Sun Dance (which was banned by the federal government in 1885)

> was an important summer ceremonial for the Plains Indians. Whites, on the other hand, were horrified at the self-mutilation involved, which did not stop them from describing in great detail the tearing flesh, the spine-tingling shrieks of the women, and the eerie chanting and drumming of the onlookers. Readers were meant to experience a real thrill of horror before they were asked to condemn the practice as 'debasing and cruel,' 'revolting' and 'barbarous.' No white writer attempted to put the ceremony into the context of Indian religious beliefs. (66)

Bugnet makes this point even more clear by juxtaposing the Sun Dance scene with Nipsya's first attendance at mass, during which she admires the grandeur of the church, its ornaments, and the music, and above all the story of Christ (123-25). She is appalled, in contrast, by the bloody Sun Dance, and begins to distance herself psychologically from her grandmother, who "était friande de ces spectacles sanglants et mystérieux" (141). The closer Nipsya identifies with the Métis, the more she pulls away from the Cree. As presented by Bugnet, the two cultures are mutually exclusive because Cree "paganism" is incompatible with Métis Christianity.

Mahigan is eliminated entirely as a potential mate by his violence toward Nipsya when, aware that she is attracted to him, he makes a sexual advance toward her in the bush while she is out picking berries. This encounter makes it suddenly clear that Nipsya has crossed a psychological line to a mental space where she thinks of Mahigan as Other. She is appalled at the thought of having been "si près de se laisser prendre par Mahigan, un sauvage" (204). Here, Bugnet relies on the civilization/savagery binary to indicate an absolute difference between Métis and Cree. The use of the word "sauvage" to refer to a full-blood Indian is consistent with the usage of French Métis in the nineteenth century, but in this scene, Bugnet relies on the connotative rather than the referential power of the word to convey Nipsya's reaction of repulsion and to underline the girl's sense of separation from the Cree community that she has hitherto been part of through her grandmother. This psychological development is indicative of how, historically, religious conversion also involved the self-denigration of infiltrated consciousness, in which an oppressed person accepts the dominant group's estimation of her own group (or relations) and therefore of herself.

Mahigan comes to represent the stereotype of the vanishing Indian following an escalation of violent acts. After being caught by his brother, Mistatim, trying to steal an ermine from his trapline (252), Mahigan attempts to murder Mistatim and finally, believing him to be dead, commits suicide out of remorse (260). The portraits of Mahigan and Nipsya's Cree grandmother, which retail stereotypes of Indians as primitive, superstitious, violent and "noble" only in death, are perhaps the best indication that for Bugnet, the Métis already belong to a very different, redeemable ethnic category. His inability to understand and describe the pull that Cree society and culture might have on Nipsya, even though she has spent her formative years within it, saps all drama from her liminality. According to this narrative, the girl's white blood has already separated her from her Creeness and prepared her to make the transition into a culture that is presented as unquestionably superior.

The crux of the drama in the novel is actually represented by Nipsya's choice between French- and English-Canadian culture. According to Bugnet's religious convictions, Alec represents an even greater threat than Mahigan because he entices Nipsya through secular humanism, which is rather more attractive than gory paganism. He plies her with violin music, shows her books full of beautiful pictures (221), and tells Nipsya about the imperial greatness of England and the inevitable arrival of industry and commerce to make something of the "sterile" (224) land. To demonstrate the dangers of Alec's anti-religious leanings, Bugnet reveals him as morally and spiritually bankrupt through his callous and offhand treatment of an emotionally vulnerable Nipsya. Having misled the young woman into believing he feels some attachment to her, Alec returns from a trip to Edmonton with a white wife, the school teacher Flora. The final shock of rejection is delivered at a reception where Flora treats Vital with disdain and forbids her husband from seeing Nipsya (241).

In this scene, the white woman acts as the arbiter of social norms and makes it clear that Nipsya's liminality and mobility – her ability to move between different cultures and segments of society – are dangerous in that they threaten her own status based on a presumption of racial superiority. Historically, the belated policing of racial boundaries and colonial privilege by white women after they began to arrive in Western Canada was one of the crucial turning points for the status of Métis women and of métissage itself. As Sylvia Van Kirk emphasizes, the long history of interracial unions and marriages that gave rise to the Métis people was possible precisely because no white women were present until the mid-nineteenth century. "In colonial societies where white women were present, even if in a minority," writes Van Kirk, "relations between European men and native women were largely restricted to casual or illicit affairs. In seeking to re-establish the domestic life of the mother country, the European woman zealously guarded her status as wife and mother" (*"Many Tender Ties"* 40). Flora's brief but potent action in the novel has the effect of cutting off Nipsya's access to Alec as a potential mate, which leaves her no choice but to accede to Métis status by marrying Vital.

After rescuing Nipsya from a near-suicidal death in a frozen lake following Alec's rejection, Vital is finally shaken out of his Christian didacticism long enough to declare his love for Nipsya. Their marriage provides a comedic ending to a narrative that resolves Métis ethnic ambiguity by arranging ethnically matched couples. "Que nos fils [...] soient comme les saules et comme ton âme," Vital tells Nipsya in the end, "humbles, utiles et variés; qu'ils demeurent le sang et l'âme du pays, les serviteurs dociles de la Sagesse" (292), promising the development of a new breed of Franco-Métis Canadian through acceptable endogamous métissage rather than dangerous originary métissage.

Earl Fitz argues that in *Nipsya*, Métis liminality represents a danger to white society because of a taint associated with interracial reproduction. According to Fitz, "the narrative voice suggests that the Métis are already 'tainted' because of the 'illicit' nature of their engendering and that only by living a saintly existence can they ever hope to remove this 'blemish' from their race and gain respectability" (81). The "illicit" nature of (originary) métissage is based on a belief that a natural distinction exists between the races, and that this distinction should be maintained by a social separation that particularly prohibits sexual relations that might produce mixed-race children. From this perspective, whether the actual relationship between interracial spouses is morally questionable (as in the case of Nipsya's mysteriously absent parents) or morally sound (in the case of Cléophas Lajeunesse and his Cree wife) makes no difference whatsoever.

In this reading, the transgression of racial boundaries, regardless of the circumstances or attitudes of the spouses and the social conventions within which their union took place, is censured retroactively on the basis of the altered norms of a more conservative racial ideology imported from Europe after the middle-ground period of métissage was past. This is the situation that has reigned in Canada since the end of the fur trade period: middle ground métissage has been misunderstood and interpreted within a more agonized scenario for colonial contact than was actually the case. This re-interpretation places the voyageur's harmonious relationship with his beloved Native wife on the same footing as the furtive and transgressive relationship that we are led to believe existed between Nipsya's parents. The children of all such interracial couples are then presumed to share in the "taint" that was subsequently associated with their relationships.

Bugnet most likely had no intention of suggesting any such stigma for his Métis characters. Nevertheless, he indirectly makes precisely that suggestion through his negative portrayal of Mahigan and by failing to acknowledge any positive Native influence within Métis culture or spirituality. In Bugnet's narrative, métissage is the ground on which a Europeanized culture can be developed; by the end of the novel, blood ties with Cree ancestors remain purely a matter of inheriting and maintaining some connection to the land, thus providing a guarantee of indigeneity. As the spokesperson for this utopian vision, Father Lozée tells Nipsya's grandmother that despite the death of a "true Cree" such as Mahigan, "le sang des Kris survivra, même s'il se mêle au sang des Blancs" (189). The survival of "blood" is meant to be assurance enough for the Cree elder, even if accompanied culturally by total Europeanization. He points to Cléophas Lajeunesse's large family as the sign of this survival, assuring the grandmother, "Vous voyez, madame, vos descendants sont une forte race. Ils ne sont pas près de disparaître" (189). Together with Lozée's dream of a universal Christian faith to be forged by the union of Protestants and Catholics in Western Canada (190-91), the idea of the Métis as the legitimate heirs to Canada's Native people echoes Riel's vision of the Métis as a chosen people.

The narrative orchestration of the final union between Nipsya and Vital also conveys, more disturbingly, the message that métissage has no inherent positive value but is a process that takes on value only when it unfolds in the right circumstances and subject to the proper influences. In effect, Nipsya must be transformed from an "Indienne métissée" to a proper "Métisse" before she is acceptable as a wife for Vital, the ideal Métis man, and as a person worthy of becoming part of the French community in the West. The story of Nipsya's interactions with the Irish Alec makes it clear, however, that mere "whitening" of the Métis is not sufficient for the French author. The ideal is specifically based on French culture – meaning primarily the French language, Catholic religion, and an agricultural economy – with an implicit legitimizing of French-Indian métissage and deligitimizing of English-Indian métissage.

The acceptance of métissage and the Métis as part of the Western French-Canadian experience and identity clashes with the normative Britishness of the early twentieth century. As Daniel Coleman shows, the British norms set out for Canadian society in the early twentieth century were at once inclusive and homogenizing:

> Insofar as the product [i.e., good Canadians] could be made from boys and girls of any class, ethnicity, or race, it was, for its time, a remarkably inclusive civil ideal; but insofar as that product required assimilation or conversion to White, British norms, it was also homogenizing. The theoretical possibility of egalitarian inclusion means that early twentieth-century Canadian progressivism did not hold a biologically based, racist view that outsiders were automatically disqualified from becoming A.1 Canadians on the basis of heredity or bloodlines. But the demand of assimilation shows that it was unquestionably ethnocentric and therefore culturally racist. (152)

With respect to Indian peoples, this ideology is consistent with the belief that they were destined to vanish, thus removing any difficulty they may have posed for forming a homogeneous society. Bugnet contradicts the vision referred to by Coleman in that the French author asserts the capacity and value of maintaining an autonomous Francophone Métis society within Western Canada whose Catholicism is inimical to the Protestant faith of the dominant group. He also clashes with the Anglophone view in including the Métis as a significant element within civil society and, through his portrait of Alec and his wife, he criticizes the racist treatment of the Métis by Anglo-Canadians.

Nevertheless, in some respects Bugnet's vision of métissage parallels the attitude described by Coleman. Within the narrative constraints he sets up, Nipsya is not free to follow Cree beliefs. To emphasize their undesirability, those beliefs are represented by her superstitious grandmother and the doomed Mahigan, both of whom belong to the past, not the future. Nipsya's early awareness of points of conjunction or compatibility between the two belief systems, such as the idea of a Great Spirit, make her acceptance of Christianity remarkably smooth. While the French writer includes the Métis in the group of acceptable subjects for assimilation, then, he presents a Francophone equivalent of white civility as a suitable ideal for them. Nipsya's Métis difference is acceptable to a Franco-centred vision of the world, as long as she conforms to the fundamental tenets and values represented by that vision.

This reading of the text still raises the question of where métissage ends and assimilation begins. If Vital – French-speaking, devoutly Catholic, a hard-working farmer – is a figure of assimilation, then is Riel himself to be considered an assimilated Métis, thoroughly Euro-Canadian in all but ancestry and a claim to indigeneity? The problem of blood versus culture as markers of ethnic or racial belonging remains a thorny one. We now recognize that cultures change, whereas ancestry is often seen as solid and enduring. Yet the history of Métis identity shifts shows that the meanings of ancestry too change over time as attitudes toward ancestral groups shift. The modern idea of identity, particularly for mixedblood people, is not just whom you descend from, but whom you *acknowledge* descending from. It is identity by both descent and consent (to borrow Sollors's phrase) combined.

The idea of acknowledging ancestry and bonds with related groups – what might also be thought of as one's loyalties – is an important part of the makeup of a Métis man such as Riel. This fact is evident in the Métis' active solicitation of alliance with the Cree and other Indian groups before and during their 1885 action. Bugnet's hero Vital, Europeanized as he may appear to be, demonstrates where his loyalties lie when he speaks at a political meeting (where he is portrayed as more level-headed and deliberating than the hot-headed Mahigan) and lays his life on the line by going to Saskatchewan to fight at Batoche.

For all his insistence on the ideal Métis as a Europeanized rather than an Indianized mixedblood, Bugnet is far more sympathetic toward the Métis, and paints them more realistically, than the schizophrenic caricatures of the "halfbreed" that appear in much popular fiction of the time (LaRocque, "Metis" 88-89; Scheick's observations on the halfbreed in American popular literature apply in Canada as well, where such literature was also read). Indeed, Bugnet's picture of Vital is consistent with the sort of ideal that Riel himself would have endorsed for the Métis. It is ironic, of course, that upon Vital's return from defeat at Batoche, Father Lozée nonetheless sees a complete political victory for the Métis:

> Vous avez combattu sans grand espoir de triomphe, mais de sorte à vous faire craindre. Vous êtes sûrs maintenant d'être respectés et d'obtenir ce que vous avez si longtemps demandé. Nos vastes contrées de l'Ouest canadien auront leur gouvernement distinct, élu par vous-mêmes, et elles pourront librement se faire leurs destinées. Vos titres de terres vous seront

> accordés sans délai. J'en ai l'assurance formelle. Les droits des Kris eux-mêmes seront sauvegardés, et l'État les protègera contre les rapacités des Blancs. (Bugnet 289)

Bugnet was prescient enough to predict in 1930 that "Our grandsons will call [Riel] a great patriot, a misunderstood genius" (Lennox and Lacombe 94), but his conclusion is too distant from the reality of the time for it to be considered realistic. Rather than continuing quietly and prosperously on their farms, the Métis were pushed off the land as European settlers arrived, and had no access to Indian reserves since they had no formal status under the Indian Act. In that sense, at the time he wrote *Nipsya* in the late 1920s, Bugnet was already able to witness the reality for the Métis in Alberta, which was much less rosy than the utopian future promised by of the novel's ending. The isolated and impoverished wage labourer that Maurice Constantin-Weyer portrays is much more typical of the actual status of Métis men in Western Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Napoléon: Métissage as Tragic Flaw

Constantin-Weyer immigrated to Manitoba in 1904 to try his hand at farming (or "ranching," as his more romantic view would have it) and business ventures, and returned to France in 1914 to enlist in the army at the beginning of World War I. He portrays a number of Métis characters in several novels and short stories set in Canada. Known collectively as Constantin-Weyer's *Épopée canadienne*, these works include the novel *Un homme se penche sur son passé*, which in 1928 was awarded the Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary prize. Although he has been accused of misrepresenting the Métis "sous un jour délibérément faux et odieux" as "Ivrognes, paresseux, menteurs, débauchés, blasphémateurs, superstitieux, exploiteurs d'enfants" (Frémont 48), Zachary Ralston Taylor nonetheless calls the character of Napoléon, based on one of Constantin-Weyer's hired men, one of the author's most sympathetic and realistic Métis portraits, that of "un homme foncièrement bon" (22). Roger Motut goes even further, stating that "comme étude de personnages et de moeurs, [*Napoléon*] laisse un portrait réel des Métis de l'époque" (50).

The apparent sympathy for Napoléon is, however, ultimately undermined by the narrator's actions in the novel. This homodiegetic narrator expresses deep admiration and fondness for Napoléon, yet he repeatedly takes centre stage to help Napoléon gain retribution after some misadventure or to repair the damage caused by Napoléon's misguided actions. The final impression that the narrative leaves of Napoléon is that of someone who has managed to raise his social status above that of other Métis, but who meets a foolish death owing to his own flawed nature and the unsurmounted racial prejudice of others.

The novel begins with a preface that places the Métis in a positive context by outlining their origins as the offspring of a French elite. Constantin-Weyer sketches the background of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye, the Frenchman who first explored and established trading posts in what is now Western Canada. La Vérendrye, he says, "comme tous les hommes actifs de l'époque, au Canada, ne rêvait que d'étendre la domination française" (12). The Métis are positioned, then, as the offspring of that desire for French domination, arising from unions between the explorer's men and Indian women: "Il est né d'eux et de ces Indiennes une race hardie et intelligente, qui n'a pas toujours pris le meilleur de ses ancêtres, mais qui a contribué à maintenir, presque jusqu'à nos jours, le prestige du nom français dans l'Ouest canadien" (19-20). Constantin-Weyer states that though there have been eminent Métis men, his own hero is not one of them. Instead, this is the story of "un humble métis" (19). Napoléon is "un garçon simple et bon.... Et la civilisation a une part considérable dans la tragédie de sa vie" (20). Beginning with a factual historical sketch and continuing the story with no discernible switch in narrative voice or perspective reinforces the idea that the story of Napoléon is strongly biographical, and that the description of the Métis is more ethnography than fiction.

The condescension in the phrases "a good, simple boy" or a "humble Métis" might be likened to the idea of the "good Indian," according to which the Métis can be seen in a positive light as long as they remember their subordinate place in society, work hard (for white landowners) and refrain from making claims against the newly arrived European settlers. Viewed from a contemporary perspective on racial ideology, that is precisely the sort of construction that would be made of Constant-Weyer's phrases. Yet there may well be another stereotype involved here: that of the good-hearted, lower-class French-Canadian, the salt-of-the-earth type who comes from sturdy stock but is incapable of rising above a serviceable level in society. La Vérendrye belonged to a French-Canadian elite whose explorations extended French influence to Western Canada and beyond, but the *voyageurs* who took Indian wives were not part of that elite. Inherent in the portrait of Napoléon, then, is a parallel distinction – between La Vérendrye and his French-Canadian voyageurs and between the narrator and his Métis hired hand – that is based on class as well as race.

This double valence of the author-narrator's attitude toward the Métis man is a demonstration of the sort of semiotic multiplicity that is inevitably wrapped up in Métis characterizations. Attitudes toward Métis people (both historical and literary) do not encompass *solely* attitudes toward Indian race or toward mixed race; because métisness includes, potentially, a French-Canadian element and a gendered element as well, all of these variables can come into play in representations of the Métis. For some Francophone authors, including Bugnet, the French aspect of the Métis is an important defining feature. They are considered a fundamental constituent of Western Canada's Francophone minority, the enduring sign of past French dominance of the west, and a cornerstone of current claims by the Francophone minority that they occupy a fundamental place in Western Canada.

It is important to recall that the history of métissage in Canada was determined to a large extent by class differences rather than national ideologies. Senior Hudson's Bay Company managers and the colonial officials of New France were equally suspicious of métissage as a practice that pulled young men away from their centralized control, but those men accepted it as a natural part of fur trade life and therefore, quite simply, of life. The practical requirements of the fur trade inevitably led to a pragmatic acceptance of métissage on the part of the authorities, who had no effective way of preventing it. Thus it is that working-class attitudes played a significant part in making métissage a normal part of contact, even though official discourse might suggest otherwise.[41]

By the time Constantin-Weyer was writing, however, the Métis were no longer the backbone of the Western fur trade and the dominant force in prairie communities. Fifty years of European migration and immigration to the west had displaced the Métis from their prominence (when they were central to the fur trade, the buffalo hunt, and the carting trade in the North-West) to the sort of marginal position occupied by Napoléon, a young man who is an itinerant farm hand rather than a farm owner. Mass immigration from eastern Canada and Europe was accompanied by views of Native people that were also imported from outside the middle ground of fur trade contact. As we see in *Napoléon*, the prejudices that governed attitudes toward "Indians" shifted in this period to the Métis, whose presence was more evident to newcomers. The Métis's self-definition as distinct because of mixed blood was susceptible to a racist interpretation of them as a degraded form of "Indian."

At the same time, Constantin-Weyer naturally shares some of the class prejudices of the metropolitan French. Just as English Canadians felt, and resented, the condescending attitude of metropolitan British people toward "colonials," no matter how English they may have considered themselves, so there is more than a trace of condescension in this metropolitan French attitude toward "our" Métis – that is, the remnants of French greatness strewn about the globe as indicators of past glory, interesting enough to capture a French audience's attention but not in themselves particularly heroic or glorious. In this, Constantin-Weyer echoes a chauvinistic and paternalistic strain found in writing by some French authors – travellers or priests – who are describing the Métis for a metropolitan audience.[42]

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[41] See Havard (646-51); Spear, "'They Need Wives'"; Van Kirk *"Many Tender Ties"* (24-25); Ens (17-18), and Hoerder. Brian Gallagher argues that even amongst HBC officers, the attention paid to those who sought out white wives has exaggerated the phenomenon, since "in the last two decades before Confederation, nearly all the most powerful men in Red River were married to Metis women" (25). This phrasing obscures the fact that by that time, many of the most powerful men in Red River were themselves mixed-blood men. While she is discussing French Louisiana rather than the northern fur trade, Jennifer Spear also discusses the very different attitudes taken by French officials and missionaries toward mixed-race marriages. Contrasting their general acceptance of white-Indian marriages with their condemnation of white-black liaisons, Spear writes that "A possible explanation is that the French considered Indians more like themselves (whether culturally or racially) than Africans or that what differences there were could be more easily overcome" ("Colonial" 95).

Napoléon La Ronde is born, at the opening of the novel, into an impoverished family. The La Rondes live in a poor but warm and well-made shack and earn a livelihood from hunting, summering cattle for local ranchers, and cutting wood that they barter in town for flour, lard, whisky and cash (27). They speak a French dialect that, while it appears to be a degraded form of the classical French in the surrounding narrative, is recognizably French and roughly the equivalent of any dialect that might be spoken in French Canada (or in rural France, for readers in Constantin-Weyer's home country). Leisure time is spent smoking pipes and telling stories, playing jigs on the fiddle, and step-dancing. In a series of vignettes, Constantin-Weyer describes the colourful and exotic life of the La Ronde family.

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[42] One of the clearest examples of this idea appears in the writings of Oblate missionary Émile Petitot, whose journal of his arrival in northern Canada was published in 1887. In his introduction, Petitot tells his readers that it was the French-Canadian *coureurs de bois* who "ont fait de nos descendants américains, les Métis du Canada et de la Louisiane, une race exceptionnellement virile et apte à toute espèce de travaux." He appeals to nationalistic sentiments in asserting that "Le peuple français a donc intérêt à connaître les pays qui furent le théâtre des exploits, des aventures ou des labeurs de tant d'enfants de la France, et dont personne jusqu'ici ne l'a encore entretenu avec connaissance de cause" (3). Constantin-Weyer uses precisely the same sort of rhetoric in his preface to *Napoléon*, making the story more germane to his readers than a pure story of exotic lands, while also setting himself up as someone who has rare firsthand knowledge of the Métis.

The author begins his story with an emphasis on class: poverty is described as one of the defining characteristics and at the same time one of the saving graces of the Métis: “Les métis sont généralement pauvres, royalement pauvres, – comme les gens qui sont trop généreux, – et ils savent des choses que les riches ne comprendront jamais” (26). The valorizing of poverty as imparting valuable knowledge unavailable to the wealthy takes on more racist overtones, however, when the author introduces the idea of Métis difference as one that is also based on race. He notes that “blancs purs” differ from the Métis in that they easily get lost in the woods and have to be searched for and brought back home. Having described Napoléon’s training with his father – learning how to recognize each cow, to tame and harness a horse, or to kill a rabbit – who has an answer for all the boy’s questions about the world, Constantin-Weyer falls back on the argument that blood alone, not culture or education, accounts for the Métis’ exceptional geographical orientation: “Cet instinct de ne jamais se perdre dans la forêt, il l’avait hérité par la seule grâce d’une goutte de sang indien” (48). The entire structure of ethnographical detail is casually swept aside in favour of the old race-based notion that Indian traits – not only physical but also epistemological and moral traits – are passed down through the blood.

The idyllic description of Napoléon’s childhood turns sour as he approaches adolescence: after a heavy-drinking friend pays a visit, Napoléon’s father, Jérémie, turns to drinking and the family gradually disintegrates. His mother and sisters go to work in the town hotel to earn money because Jérémie now spends all his earnings on alcohol. When the father dies soon afterward, the children are distributed amongst various relatives because his wife cannot look after all of them alone.

At the age of sixteen, Napoléon moves further west to become a cowboy, sending part of his meagre paycheque home every month to help his mother (59). Napoléon takes a wrong turn into crime out of naiveté when a Norwegian man that he does not realize is a horse thief offers him higher wages to wrangle horses for him. Besides, says Constantin-Weyer, Napoléon "avait dans les veines quelques gouttes de sang sioux, et, qui ne sait que les Sioux ont toujours eu un faible pour les chevaux des autres?" (62). Once again, Constantin-Weyer calls on a simplistic biological basis of motivation for a mixedblood character, suggesting that a few drops of blood provides a plausible explanation for why the hitherto simple and honest Napoléon would naturally turn to criminal behaviour at the first opportunity. Where a class explanation would be perfectly plausible – Napoléon's desire to escape from the grinding poverty he grew up in, to help his mother and siblings even more, and to escape an exploitative employer – the character's mixedblood background is treated as a self-evident explanation that trumps all others.

The use of a blood-based explanation for Napoléon's crime shows how belief in a biological basis for behaviours or forms of knowledge lies on a slippery slope that can lead straight to racist stereotyping. When describing their path-finding abilities, Constantin-Weyer no doubt intends to compliment the Métis by describing as genetically inscribed a characteristic that makes them worthy of admiration and that cannot be appropriated by white men *because* it is biologically inherited. Nevertheless, this same mystifying race-based thinking is deployed in creating the sort of racist caricatures that LaRocque and others have pointed to as the most denigrating literary treatment of Métis or mixedblood characters, in which they feel their "red blood" rising to the fore at moments of high drama or conflict, or when drinking hard liquor ("Native Writers" 113-14). The atavistic influence of Native "blood" is used to explain brutal or foolish acts that would be out of character if the person in question were not racially mixed. It is but one step from the positive stereotype of an innate ability to keep one's bearings to the negative stereotype of an innate inability to hold one's liquor or remain even-tempered under stress. Here, the absurd idea that a drop of Sioux blood can turn Napoléon into a horse thief in an instant demonstrates the danger of using supposed racial characteristics to supply character motivations. This sort of specious, essentialist characterization had gained such general acceptance amongst white readers that it was felt to reinforce rather than to diminish the verisimilitude of the portrait.

After being released early from prison for good behaviour, Napoléon is hired by the narrator to work with him as a horse trader. In describing the homosocial life of work and play between the two men,[43] Constantin-Weyer introduces one of the main themes of the novel: the romantic praise of "natural man" and the lamenting of civilization as a force that creates an unbridgeable divide between the artificial, civilized individual and the beauty and power of primal nature. Nostalgia for an unattainable connection with nature lies at the core of the "noble savage" topos. Napoléon becomes a "noble Métis" as Constantin-Weyer shifts those values and longings onto him. The narrator admires his excellent horsemanship, the grace with which he throws a lasso, his gaiety and wit, and says that Napoléon "avait des vues de bon sens profond qui bouleversaient ma conception artificielle des choses" (Constantin-Weyer 78). In contrast, the narrator feels that he himself has been "pétri par des livres, des lois et des coutumes" and has developed the sort of "impersonnalité conventionnelle" (78) that civilized people take pride in. Having learned his morals directly "from life," Napoléon makes simpler, more vital judgments: "Il avait une morale naturelle de l'amitié, de la haine, de la solidarité, que j'admirais. Il raisonnait les choses, comme si ses arguments lui avaient été dictés par les forces les plus mystérieuses du monde" (78). Not only is Napoléon more in touch with straightforward moral values, but he is also physically more vitally connected to the earth:

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[43] "Homosociality" is understood here as "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (Sedgwick 1) that display a certain intensity and tend to exclude the opposite sex. When that intensity also involves specular fascination with the male body, it tips over into the realm of "homoeroticism," which does not necessarily entail homosexuality.

> Napoléon touchait la terre de ses deux pieds et c'était d'elle qu'il tirait sa force. Ma faiblesse venait des nombreux tapis interposés entre la terre et moi. Je n'avais plus le contact; et, même lorsque je faisais un effort pour m'approcher de la terre, c'était elle qui refusait de me reconnaître. J'étais un être artificiel et parfaitement absurde, sauf dans ce monde irréel, construit par le cerveau de quelques hommes, où j'étais né. (78-79)

This sort of lament is what Margery Fee characterizes as "a therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology [or in this case, book-learning] and the good of a life close to nature, the latter offering a temporary inoculation against the former" ("Romantic" 17). The Métis man, like the Indians of earlier literature, acts as an intermediary who helps the settler achieve vicarious primal contact with the land, thus assisting the white man in his process of "indigenization" (Goldie, *Fear* 12-14).

Unlike traditional images of the Indian, however, Napoléon is not expected to make some sort of "totem transfer" (21) and then disappear from the scene. His continued presence is required for the European settler to experience that contact vicariously, participating in it as long as he works and plays alongside Napoléon. The distinction may be that the colonial settler subject, as discussed by Goldie, seeks a permanent form of indigenization uncomplicated by continuing Native claims, whereas Constantin-Weyer's purpose, as a French author, is merely to play on the "noble Métis" idea to appeal to an audience that, after the First World War, was already convinced of the disappointing turn that European civilization had taken and eager for stories of a simpler, cleaner, morally clear-cut way of life.

The admiring descriptions of Napoléon at times take on strong overtones of homosocial desire. While separated from Napoléon during the winter, the narrator imagines the other man playing music and chasing Métis girls while he himself endures forced chastity. He longs to be riding "botte à botte" with Napoléon, driving herds of horses across the prairie – the horse being a symbol of virility that matches that of Napoléon. The narrator then describes an incident in which Napoléon, left to care for the horses during a horse-trading expedition, loses all of the horses and all of his possessions – including his clothes – to a rival group of traders. The narrator returns to the campfire to see a sight "d'une beauté incontestable": "À la lueur du feu, un homme parfaitement nu, assis sur une vieille caisse de conserves, méditait, dans la pose exacte du *Penseur* de

Rodin. Les reflets de la flamme mettaient sur ce corps des rougeurs extraordinaires" (Constantin-Weyer 86). The "rougeurs" of the reflected light remind the reader of Napoléon's exotic Indian ancestry, but the comparison with Rodin's famous statue elevates the image – ironically, for a man who has lamented his artificial European worldview – to the proper classical aesthetic. The specular nature of the scene suggests that the naked body of this "simple" man can only truly be appreciated by the cultured European gaze.

This homoerotic charge fits into a general picture of Constantin-Weyer's frontier as a privileged site of homosocial activity: almost all of the significant episodes in the novel take place between men, whose work, adventures, fights, and bouts of drinking form the bulk of the novel. Though Napoléon is the purported hero of the narrative, the narrator manages to place himself in the starring role on several occasions when he steps in to defend his hired man's honour. He chases down and retrieves Napoléon's possessions from the cheating card-players, for example, and challenges to a fight the Mountie who has told Napoléon's fiancée about his stint in jail for theft. While touting Napoléon as a Métis made good and a superior type of person who is accepted as an equal by leading members of the white community, the narrator covertly weakens his portrait of Napoléon by repeatedly suggesting that he is in need of a white defender in order to bolster or legitimize his status.

Most insidious of all to the picture of the intelligent and noble Métis is the tragic ending of the story, in which Napoléon is shot by a white man as the result of actions that can be described only as foolish. The incident begins when Napoléon becomes engaged to

Judy Jones, a white schoolteacher who says that his racial background is no hindrance because she is "au-dessus des préjugés de races" (124). A jealous Mountie informs Judy that Napoléon has done time in jail for theft. Judy breaks off the engagement and instead marries an Irishman, Bruce Flanagan. Napoléon, ostensibly playing a prank, surprises the couple as they enter their home after the wedding reception, brandishing a weapon (which turns out to be unloaded). Having caused Flanagan to break down in sobs, Napoléon turns to exit the house, and Flanagan shoots him in the back.

The narrator (along with Timmins, the NWMP officer investigating Napoléon's death) sees the tragedy in a fundamental semiotic breakdown that leads to murder. Judy and Flanagan concur that when he entered their house, Napoléon had "un aspect terrifiant" and "poussa un éclat de rire effrayant" as he threatened Flanagan. He notes that "Judy, institutrice, donne à cet éclat de rire l'épithète de 'satanique'" (171). In other words, Judy, the woman who had claimed to love Napoléon and says she has no racial prejudice and who, as a schoolteacher, should represent an enlightened view, falls back on the idea that the mixedblood man's Indian side takes over when he is angry. Not only does she discursively activate the stereotype of the "savage" Indian who easily resorts to violence and murder when provoked, but she also casts him as a heathen whom she equates with the devil when she describes his laugh as "satanic."

The narrator knows better, since he himself had told Napoléon the story of a similar trick being played, and states that "Napoléon s'amusait follement de la bonne farce qu'il était en train de faire aux nouveaux mariés" (171), a trick that was intended to show Judy that her new husband was a coward. There is a good measure of irony in

Napoléon's tragedy, of course. He gains the upper hand over Flanagan momentarily by playing on stereotypes of mixedblood volatility, but the racist response, interpreting that stereotype all too literally, is just as deadly as if Napoléon had not been feigning at all.

While *Napoléon* is a slight and in many ways superficial portrait of a Métis man, the author's decision to give it a tragic ending provides some interesting indications of how mixed race could be seen at the time as having inherently tragic qualities. The tragedy arises out of the proposed union between a Métis man and a white woman. By depicting Napoléon as separated for the most part from the Métis community, Constantin-Weyer turns him into the tragic lone figure in an uncomprehending and racist white society. His mixed blood itself becomes the tragic flaw that determines his fate. Significantly, it is not an atavistic flaw, but a flaw constructed by racist attitudes toward racial métissage. Napoléon is not the stereotypical "murderin' halfbreed" (Riley) whose Indian blood betrays him, but the stereotype is still his undoing, since his white killer cannot see any difference between the stereotype and the man in front of him. Furthermore, even if Flanagan is pretending to believe that Napoléon is a real threat, he knows that in the circumstances he will not be faulted for acting as though the threat were real.

Bugnet and Constantin-Weyer both write about the dangers to the Métis of racist tendencies in the communities in which they live. They restrict that racism to Anglo-Canadians, however, portraying the French background and influence on the Métis as salutary and accepting of them. Constantin-Weyer shows racial prejudice as ultimately unsurmountable because the Métis live in a white society while having few defences against it and are also undermined by inherent weaknesses of character; Bugnet sees a solution in Métis endogamy, which provides for the continuation of a Franco-Métis ideal without the worst qualities of pure Indian or pure white man. A major difference between these portraits, then, is that Napoléon is an isolated individual without a strong community to rely on, whereas *Nipsya* suggests that Métis strength lies in the project of (re)building a community.

It was certainly the case that the early twentieth century continued to see a weakening of Métis communities as individuals left in search of opportunities not available locally. At the same time, the frontier society that Constantin-Weyer depicts is made up of farming and ranching families who gather on social occasions or in the course of doing business. It is a multicultural community made up not only of Métis and French people, but also English (including Irish and Scottish) people and immigrants from other European countries. From this perspective, it is difficult to discern whether the figure of Napoléon as a lone Métis individual is meant to be realistic or symbolic. In his discussion of Native peoples in white fiction, for example, Gordon Johnston suggests as a general rule that the "'exceptional' Indian figure, isolated from his cultural and social context, [is] likely to be carrying a burden of white symbolic meaning" (61). According to Johnston, one "method of subverting the symbolic role is to imagine the Indian characters in their social and cultural context, to expand the frame of the mirror to include more of their own setting, *not* to move them into a white world" (61). Clearly, the context is not the same for Métis people, who have a history of living within ethnically diverse communities, though they themselves were the majority ethnic group within many early prairie communities. While the question of maintaining a Métis community is present in both Bugnet and Constantin-Weyer, the novel by Ralph Connor under study here does not acknowledge even the possibility of such a community developing. Gordon (who used Connor as a pseudonym), the son of a Presbyterian minister, was born in Upper Canada in 1860 and spent several years in Western Canada as a missionary. *The Gaspards of Pine Croft* is a reflection of his belief in Protestantism as a force for building a forward-looking, Euro-Canadian community whose greatest value is its moral integrity, which in his mind could be derived only from Christian beliefs. Because Connor depicts métissage as an aberration that must be corrected, he cannot envisage the mixedblood person as anything but an isolated individual.

The Gaspards of Pine Croft: Recuperating Métissage

The protagonist of Connor's novel is Paul Gaspard, the son of a Scottish-French father and a Scottish mother. Hugh Gaspard, his father, has a liaison with an Indian woman, Onawata, who gives birth to an illegitimate son. After the death of his wife, Hugh marries Onawata and they have a second child. After Hugh's death, Paul looks after his step-family, moving to the Athabasca region for several years to do so. Upon his return to "civilization" in southern British Columbia, he becomes a successful construction engineer and a pillar of Christian society, a new representative of energetic, forward-looking and indigenized colonial youth who will build Canada.

The theme of métissage is introduced early through the figure of Hugh Gaspard, whose Scottish practicality has made him an engineer but who also has an artistic side "drawn from his mingled Highland Scot and Gallic blood strain" (7). In a European man, mixed blood appears to be nothing but positive, since "Gaspard [is] enormously proud of this mingled blood of his" and is "never quite sure which strain [brings] him greater pride" (7). In Scotland, he feels more French, while in France he feels Scottish to the core. With this observation, Connor pinpoints an important aspect of difference: that it is an uneven and subjective quality that changes with context. The hybrid person does not experience his hybridity in the same way in every society in which he is immersed. What is constant, however, is the presence of a fundamental feeling of difference from the surrounding normative society, derived from whichever side of the hybrid background is at odds with the current norm. Only within a society that is generally hybridized can the individual experience hybridity itself as a normative state. André Whittaker points out that if, as is now generally accepted, hybridity is present in every culture, then normativity comes only once the idea of hybridity has been eliminated and ethnic identity successfully re-imagined as "pure" (par. 68). This tendency can be seen precisely in attempts to figure Métis identity and culture as unitary rather than split by an ever-present, uncomfortable divide. Indeed, the question of whether and how Métis characters experience or overcome the presumed divisions of hybridity is a fundamental theme of many of the texts I am discussing.

Interestingly enough, Connor does not at this early point suggest that Hugh's good traits are Scots and the bad ones French. Instead, he describes Hugh as deriving his central nature from a conjunction that makes the respective influences of the two backgrounds indistinguishable: "From both strains he drew his fiery, passionate, imaginative temperament, his incapacity, too, for the hard grind in life" (8). It is important to remember, in reading early Canadian texts, that prior to the mid-twentieth century, "race" was understood in much broader terms than merely white/Indian, white/black or white/non-white.

Nevertheless, as Daniel Coleman points out, the ideology of muscular Christianity that dominated Western Canadian society in the early twentieth century and that is reflected in Connor's novels, made a fundamental distinction between "Europeans" in general – including groups considered under-classes such as the Irish, "Bohemians" and "Galicians " – and Native Americans, who were believed to be incapable of entering the required state of civility to live alongside European peoples in Canadian society. Connor's estimation of mixedblood people is consonant with the racist vision of métissage, according to which the racial mixture resulted in an inferior type. Gaspard muses that

> of all the human beings roving the new country, the half-breed, in spite of many splendid exceptions [...] was the most to be pitied, the most despicable. Too often inheriting the weaknesses and vices of both races, he was the derelict of the borderland of civilisation. Settled down upon the land, as in the Red River Valley, he could climb to strength and honour among the white race. Roving the plains and the woods with the tribes, he frequently sank beneath their level, more easily accessible to the vices of the white man, unable and unwilling to attain to the splendid and unspoiled nobility of the red man in his native wilds. (37)

The idealization of white civilization and the myth of the noble (full-blood) savage work together to make the mixedblood the most abject and imperfect type of person.

According to this contradictory vision, contact with white civilization is both the salvation and the downfall of the Métis. The dangerous aspect of métissage is figured here as the mobility and a concomitant liminality (in the phrase "derelict of the borderland of civilization"). Geographical mobility – "roving the plains and the woods" – is not in itself dangerous, given that it does not reduce the nobility of the "tribes." It is social or racial mobility – access to white society based on an ability to move *between* woods and farms – that makes the Métis dangerous and weak, in this negative interpretation of racial métissage.

As in many stories of originary métissage in early Canadian literature, the scene and circumstances of the liaison between Hugh and Onawata are hidden from sight. The shame of illicit sex (doubly shameful because it is interracial as well as extramarital) is evidenced by the mixedblood offspring produced. In any culture that considers interracial sex in itself a shameful thing, stigma attaches to the children of those liaisons or attachments, since they make evident an illegitimate act or union that might otherwise remain secret.

The drama in *The Gaspards* begins with precisely this sort of revelation: Onawata travels to British Columbia to find Hugh Gaspard, the father of the four-year-old son she has brought with her. The revelation is played out in a pantomime between Onawata and Hugh, with Paul a baffled witness: "with a quick glance at the boy [Paul] he spoke rapidly in Indian. Fiercely she replied. Again the man spoke, pointing to the child. For reply she flung toward him an accusing finger. As if she had struck him in the face, the man stood, white, aghast, rooted in his tracks" (27). Hugh, who just a few minutes earlier had been defending Indians to his hired woman, admonishing her that "Indians do not steal" (26), now half expresses the wish that his mixedblood child were dead, and shudders when he looks at him (27). Métissage changes everything in that it is evidence of a real, physical bond between white and Indian that is quite different from the sorts of moral or imaginary bonds that arise from mere cohabitation in proximity to one another. The mixedblood child in Onawata's arms is "a fact stubborn, insistent of recognition, with possibility of overwhelming disaster" (28). The hard fact of métissage, whatever its initial motivation, remains "insistent of recognition" no matter how powerful the desire of one party to disavow it.

Connor goes so far as to suggest that the revelation of métissage (coupled with adultery) is enough to push Hugh Gaspard toward becoming a murderer: "In his horror and terror of the impending calamity of discovery he could have killed them both where they stood and buried them in that remote valley. Swiftly his mind played with that possibility. It could be done" (29). He soon comes to his senses and is appalled by his own thoughts, but realizes that this moment has shaken him to the core: "What sort of man had he become? And what might he not yet be driven to? … Would he become so demonized?" (29). In this charged scenario, métissage is a force that has the power to destroy a marriage, a man's character, and the lives of those around him. In the colonial novel, métissage provides the sort of shock potential that matches themes such as adultery and incest in metropolitan European novels.

The underlying scene of interracial sex is explained in straightforward and offhand terms: "Five years ago, on a hunting trip in the far north land, as the result of an accident, [Hugh] had made a long stay with a band of Chippewayan Indians, the lords of the Athabasca country. Cared for and nursed back to strength in the wigwam of the chief, he had played the villain as many another white man had, without thought of consequence" (28). Connor thus characterizes originary métissage according to the standard "contact zone" notion that it results from illicit (and potentially violent) sexual contact between white men and Indian women. This is a scenario playing on the notion of colonial desire – the desire that white men feel for brown women, all the more enticing in that it is explicitly or implicitly taboo. The idea that white men often "play the villain" in this way suggests that métissage is the norm in such contact zones, but that it is purely the result of white male sexual initiatives taken on a "bad" impulse, far from the regulated and "good" domestic scene.

Like Bugnet with his story of the "last true Cree" Mahigan, Connor links the theme of métissage and the myth of the vanishing Indian. Onawata tells Hugh that "This boy, this little boy … he is my son, but first he is your son" and asks, "What will he be, Indian or white man? The Indian is like the buffalo and the deer. The white man is hunting him from the plains and the woods. Soon he will be like the mountain sheep, only in the lonely valleys or the far mountain tops. What will your boy be? Where will he go?" (31). Hugh internally re-expresses the stark options in his own terms. Will his son be "Condemned to be hunted back beyond the horizon of civilisation? Or trained, fitted for a chance for life among men?" (31). According to this presentation of the problem, métissage is not a matter of creating a third space between Indian and white, but of having the ability to leap from one world to the other as a means of survival.

The suggestion that living as an Indian would not constitute "life among men" fits, of course, with the "civilization/savagery" binary. It is not merely a matter of degree, but of kind: to be "savage" is to be inhuman – not a man. In this way, the ostensibly humanizing treatment of the Indians here – the rejection of stereotypes by Hugh and Paul, the depiction of Onawata as a forceful, confident and intelligent woman – is disavowed by this single, implicitly dehumanizing phrase. Only in (Euro-Canadian) civilization will the boy be living "among men." So the leap between cultures or "worlds" is only valid in one direction: from the Indian to the white world. To move in the other direction, as Hugh Gaspard does through his relationship with Onawata, is to fall from grace. Similarly, we understand that Onawata's children are doomed if they do not make an assimilative leap into the white world.

The belief that inferior people might be raised to superior status on a par with white people through assimilation is the foundation of eugenicist thought. Yet, as Laura Ann Stoler finds in her examination of métis populations in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, the eugenicist orientation that saw education and moral improvement as a means to incorporate métis populations into the colonial nation went hand in hand with anxieties about the usurpation of white privilege. According to Stoler, colonial rule as a consequence was imbued with "tension between a form of authority simultaneously predicated on incorporation and distancing" (83). The result was a combination that she characterizes as "inclusionary rhetorics and exclusionary practices" (84), a phrase that could aptly be applied to the treatment of the Métis in Canada.

Connor uses racial métissage as the basis for his plot and the dramatic tension of the narrative, but given his abhorrence for actual racial métissage, the theme is maintained solely for its value as a scandalous detail and as a means through which Paul Gaspard, his Anglo-Canadian hero, can attain symbolic métissage. In order to arrange the métissage of the young Anglo-Canadian man, the mixed family must first be legitimized. This occurs once Hugh's wife, Marion, succumbs to her illness, never having learned of Hugh's second family. Hugh brings Onawata and her children to his ranch, scandalizing the neighbours until they discover that the two are properly married. Hugh's close friend and neighbour Colonel Pelham is sympathetic to Gaspard and opposes his wife's proposal that they cut off their friendship because of his unorthodox "*menage*" (93). His view of Gaspard's position provides important insight, however, into Connor's view of métissage as a frontier practice that has no place in modern Canadian society: "Gaspard had created a social situation for himself which would outrage the whole community. They were still a primitive country in many ways, but they had some regard for the foundations of the social order. The old days when men's passions and desires determined their conduct, with utter disregard of the opinion of decent society, had gone" (95). The social order decrees that ethnic lines may be softened enough to create a normative whiteness, but considers the line between Indian and white a deeper divide – the divide of a rigidified notion of race as immutable essence. Inclusion in the community presupposes internalizing its rules and avoiding behaviour that transgresses societal expectations. If conformity is impossible, then the appearance of conformity is the very least that is expected. This view is represented in the novel by Augusta Pelham, Colonel Pelham's wife and the character who expresses the normative attitudes of the white community. What bothers her most is "Not the existence of that doubtful appanage of [Gaspard's], but his stupid effrontery in daring to flaunt the whole thing in the face of his friends and forcing them all to cut him" (105). So it is that, ruled by the passionate nature derived from his French blood, Gaspard fails to conform and pays for that failure by losing his wife and his social position.

While Gaspard does what he considers the honourable thing by marrying Onawata and bringing her and their children to his ranch after his wife's death, he expresses concern that their presence threatens his son Paul with contamination: "I am not going to allow Paul's future to be entangled or embarrassed by association with the children of mixed blood. No one can tell how they will turn out. While I am here they will be all right, but no one knows how long I shall be with them" (110). On the individual as well as the community level, then, Connor portrays mixedblood people as "all right" while under the guidance, control, and protection of a white man, but unpredictable and potentially harmful on their own. He attempts to protect Paul by sending him to live with the Pelhams in order to remove him from the potential contamination or danger of the interracial household. Having made an arrangement that his neighbours – representatives of society at large – approve of, the unorthodox interracial household has been legitimized far enough that Paul can develop a relationship with his mixed-race siblings and Indian stepmother. That relationship, in turn, is the foundation for the second part of the novel, in which Paul becomes the ideal Canadian.

The process begins upon the death of Hugh Gaspard, who is accidentally shot by Onawata as she tries to defend herself against sexual assault by Sleeman, a neighbour who has become a drinking and gambling partner of Hugh's. In this way, the "temptation" of the Indian woman leads to disaster, affirming the idea that nothing good can come of intimate contact between Indians and whites. Gaspard pays for his unregulated lifestyle not only with the life of his first wife and his social position, but also, ultimately, with his own life. On his deathbed, he passes responsibility for his Native family to his son Paul, confident that he "will do justly by them" (159). But Paul's life, like Hugh's, is altered by Onawata's actions when she burns down the neighbour's house in an attempt to get revenge. The first part of the novel closes with Paul leaving the ranch in order to flee with Onawata and her children to take refuge with her Chipewyan people. Despite Colonel Pelham's exhortation that he must not "throw away [his] life like that" or "mix [himself] up with this thing" (168), Paul insists on accompanying them in order to honourably keep his promise to his father.

The second half of the novel opens in a snowy wasteland with a heroic episode in which a now indigenized Paul saves his stepfamily from exposure and starvation. After six years of living with Onawata's people, Paul has become a young man who can drive a dog team, build a shelter and a fire, find his way to a HBC post in a blizzard, and push himself despite extreme exhaustion to rescue his family. At his moment of greatest weakness, when he begins to succumb to fear on hearing in the blizzard "notes of hate and savage fury as of raging beasts" (180), Paul is saved by his memory of "the good and kindly God whom he had been taught to know as his friend" (181). His paralyzing fear eases, and he knows that "he [will] win through. No blizzards that blew could down him. His Calvinistic faith held him steady on his course" (182). Indigenous know-how allied with bracing Christian faith – the foundations of Paul's symbolic métissage – form a powerful combination that is perfectly suited to overcome the challenges of life in a wild northern country.

In this process, Paul becomes the epitome of the muscular Christian who, "with his untiring and virile physical body balanced by his spiritually sensitive heart, made a perfect representation of the ideal Canadian who could carry out the hard physical work of territorial expansion, as well as the equally important social work of building a new civil society" (Coleman 129). Paul's time spent in the wilds thanks to his association with a mixed-race family is what allows him to gain the requisite courageous virility that gives potency to the formula. The author makes it clear, however, that Paul's métissage is purely symbolic and not physical. Onawata states to the NWMP officer interviewing her that "[Paul] is not Indian, and he must not join himself to my people. I have kept him clean" (Connor 203). He has virtuously avoided the taint of physical métissage to which earlier generations succumbed, proving himself superior to his father and forming the vanguard of a new, racially pure yet ostensibly tolerant generation of Canadians. Not incidentally, Hugh Gaspard's descent into racial métissage is implicitly attributed to his French blood, part of the English prejudice against the French being aimed at the lax morals that compelled them to intermarry with Native women. So it is that Hugh's own métissage entails a flaw that leads to his undoing. According to the view represented by Connor, ideal métissage takes the form of a symbolic transfer of knowledge and abilities without the closer bond – and dangerous "taint" – that might arise from physical métissage.

The final step in the process of symbolic métissage is Paul's emergence from Native life and incorporation into the nation-building process. He applies his engineering education by becoming a home-builder and defends the downtrodden by applying his mastery of "all the tricks of Indian wrestling" (217). Significantly, he also becomes a defender of Native people, describing Onawata's father as "a man of the finest courage and endurance" who cares well for his people, sticks by his word and is "clean right through to the bone" (308). When he tells an English newcomer about his father's Indian wife, the man is stricken literally with the unspeakability of the union: "Your father's—— Good Lord!—— I mean——." The local minister steps in to praise Onawata as "a fine, educated, Christian woman" and Paul transforms the unspeakability of transgression into the inexpressibility of a human connection, saying "She was that and more than that to me" (309). Coleman points to this exchange as one in which Paul demonstrates his moral superiority to the Englishman "by refusing to denigrate First Nations people as savages and by instead identifying boldly and publicly with his Chipewyan stepmother" (206). As an expression of symbolic métissage, this may be an exemplary show of solidarity with Native people. Nevertheless, it also fits with the myth of the vanishing Indian according to which noble savages can be praised and mourned precisely because they remain strictly separate from white society and make no demands or claims on it.

Onawata's mixedblood children, for their part, are assured of good treatment as Paul's wards. Having been educated at a Protestant missionary school, they are promised a future of paternalistic care by their white brother. As an allegorical figure for the young Canadian nation, Paul represents in this respect the patriarchal state that continuously infantilizes Native people in order to justify a perpetual guardian-ward relationship with them.[44]

The end of the novel, in which the earlier romantic attachment between Peg Pelham and Paul Gaspard is reaffirmed, provides a reassuring resolution to the métissage plot by suggesting that Paul, part of a stronger and wiser generation than that of his father, will refrain from engaging in originary métissage with its disastrous consequences. In this way, métissage is recuperated for the good of Canadian society: harmonious relations are maintained between Native and white people by establishing a separation between them that will minimize harmful racial métissage, and by charitably incorporating Métis children into white society. This transition is figured as the crucial move from a frontier society with its lax racial hygiene to the new social order that takes a proper racial order – including in the first instance a prohibition against racial métissage – as one of its prime values.

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[44] Historian Sarah Carter notes that this type of relationship was established by the Canadian government after Confederation in 1867; before that, the British government had treated with Indian bands on an equal nation-to-nation basis. The Indian Act of 1876, says Carter, "established race-based laws and limitations in Canada" for the first time. "It consigned Aboriginal people to the status of minors; they were British subjects but not citizens, sharing the status of children, felons, and the insane, and it established the federal government as their guardian" (*Aboriginal* 117).

Though neither *Nipsya* nor *Napoléon* gives a full picture of what a Métis community might be – in the first novel, it is merely suggested at the end as a utopian vision for future Métis strength, while in the latter the Métis community is introduced only as a plot device for a single episode – they do at least suggest the possibility that there is such a thing as a Métis community. In *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*, that possibility is precluded because of the overwhelming presumption of a white/Indian binary in which the Indian world is disappearing and the white world is replacing and to some extent absorbing it. The notion of a "third space" between the two in which mutual contact, recognition, and respect continue to develop and unfold is decidedly not a part of Connor's vision of the ideal Canadian future. Onawata must hand her children over to Hugh or Paul to make them "fit" for life in the white world. No in-between place is imaginable according to this ideology. Onawata's attempt to become acceptable to white society by learning English, converting to Christianity and setting up household with a white husband is scuttled in an instant by her recidivist return to savagery after the attempted sexual assault against her. For Connor, the taint carried by Indian blood cannot be erased. Racial métissage is untenable as a basis for civility; symbolic métissage of the white man is the ideal means of Canadianizing the immigrant without compromising any of his superior cultural attributes.

In this vision, métissage becomes a supplement to European strengths and values rather than a means by which to question or adjust those values as a result of contact with a new and vital culture. The idea of the vanishing Indian explains this rejection of egalitarian métissage: if Indian peoples and their ways are doomed to disappear as a result of contact with Europeans, then they are hardly to be emulated wholesale. Instead, a partial transfer is desired – a métissage that is controlled by the white participant in the exchange. In a transaction that is akin to Fee's idea of the totem transfer, métissage as envisioned by Connor is the passing of knowledge that the Anglo-Canadian can use for his own benefit and for the benefit of new Canadians, without absorbing the taint that accompanies physical métissage. This is métissage not as an exchange between equals involving mutual recognition and respect, but as a controlled (and therefore unthreatening), unidirectional symbolic indigenization.

All three novels raise the question of gender and racism: in all three narratives, the presence of a white woman creates the point of maximum tension in the cross-racial relationship. So it is that Hugh Gaspard is wracked not by the "sin" of adulterous interracial sex itself, but of "the dread terror of detection" (Connor 35) by the white wife "without whose respect and love life would lose its meaning and value" (34). Métissage figures as a threat to white women who depend on marriage for their position in life; as a result, they act as the guardians of whiteness, which is threatened by the "temptation" of non-white women and the lack of sexual self-control of white men. In effect, white women begin to exercise in Western Canada the sort of control over racial mixing that imperial and colonial authorities had been unable to enforce (Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"* 40).

In these three works of fiction, there are significant differences between the attitudes and positions of the female characters: Flora, Alec's new bride, insists that he cut off his friendship with Nipsya and upon meeting Vital, comments that "C'est un bel homme, mais on voit bien qu'il a du sang indien" (Bugnet 241). For Flora, the race line she perceives between herself and the Métis precludes associating with them. Judy Jones, the white woman in *Napoléon*, would appear to be Flora's opposite – an Ontario woman who is happy to marry Napoléon and rejects the racial prejudice that the narrator assumes might be an obstacle to such a union. But after rejecting Napoléon as a "thief" and spitefully marrying a white man, Judy also occupies the position of the woman who must be defended from an ostensibly threatening Métis man. Her love for Napoléon and avowed rejection of prejudice against him cannot prevent her playing that role nevertheless. Finally, in *The Gaspards*, Marion appears as the sickly and saintly wife who is betrayed by a métissage that she knows nothing about.

Both Bugnet and Constantin-Weyer reflect a sense of the Métis beset by the changes brought by outsiders who are redefining the world they inhabit, even if this "world" is represented sketchily. The difference in their visions – one romantic-comedic, the other tragic – is determined in part by the attenuated place of the Métis community in their portraits. By drawing a portrait of a single Métis man in a white-dominated society characterized by a steady undercurrent of racial prejudice, Constantin-Weyer draws out the tragic qualities of his hero. Bugnet creates drama in his novel by orchestrating a brush with tragedy for Nipsya as a result of contact with the white world, but opts for a happy outcome by adumbrating a revitalized future through community-building around the Métis family nucleus.

The greatest difference in Connor's view of mixedblood people is precisely that he entirely discounts the notion of a Métis community, for this would suggest the existence of a collective identity and therefore at least the beginnings of a culture. The refusal to recognize a separate identity for the Métis is encapsulated in the word "halfbreed," which in Canada was used in English to designate the Métis right up until the 1970s.[45] The binaristic implication was that only "Indian" and "white" worlds existed. The mixedblood individual (who was almost always portrayed as an individual rather than as the member of a thriving community) would remain an isolated "marginal man," "one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic, cultures" (Stonequist xv) unless and until he chose to assimilate into one of those normative categories. Since the Indians were believed to be doomed, the only real option was to become "white." Anyone who insisted on inhabiting a third space with a culture and lifestyle that did not conform to either of those options was assumed to be – and therefore made to be – alienated.

The choice presented by Connor shows that the "options" are in fact a logical trap that operate by to delegitimizing any notion of Métis identity or difference. According to the colonial logic reflected in *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*, civilization – an exclusively European attribute – represents progress and is the only way forward; but the "civ/sav" binary says that Indians are incapable of being civilized. Savagery, meaning the lack of civilization, is a defining attribute of Indians. Connor holds out the promise that métissage is a meliorative path out of this conundrum: the injection of white blood into

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[45] Some Métis writers have now reappropriated the word in a gesture of self-affirming defiance, following the lead of Maria Campbell who, in her 1973 autobiography, "wears [the name "halfbreed"] as a badge of merit and pride" (Petrone 120). The practice continues today: in her latest collection, Marilyn Dumont writes of "the breed women who raised me" (*That Tongued Belonging* 8).

Indians through miscegenation makes them capable of making the "leap" out of their Indianness and into a superior state of (notional) whiteness. Yet the subordination of the two mixedblood children, the necessity for them to be educated and constantly supervised by their white half-brother, indicates that even the most improved mixedbloods will always be inferior to Euro-Canadians. They are eclipsed by the symbolic métis Paul, who is shown to combine the best of British Christian morality and self-discipline along with Native primal vigour acquired during his years with the Chipewyan. The place of the ideal Canadian that is occupied by the Métis Vital Lajeunesse in Bugnet's novel is here taken up by an Anglo-Canadian, who in Connor's vision renders even the most admirable Métis superfluous to the development of Canadian society.

The literature from the early twentieth century depicting Métis or mixedblood characters reflects some of the conundrums of thinking about métissage that were caused by the biologization of character. Whether writing in French or English, these authors contemplate the possibility of how mixedblood people can be "improved" through their association with or incorporation within European institutions. The differences between them involve the level of solidarity or sympathy that they feel with the Métis and their claims to form a separate ethnicity worthy of respect. The narratives in *Nipsya* and *Napoléon* do tend to approve of their protagonists the more fully they conform with a normative Francophone culture. In both cases, Indian ancestry acts as a double-edged sword: it provides an indigenous connection with the land that is a supreme value, yet it also acts as a flaw that must be overcome or contended with during times of crisis. In *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*, Indian blood has the quality of a taint that makes the mixedblood permanently inferior. The ideal form of métissage – symbolic métissage – is accessible only to the white man who refrains from physical métissage.

The dangers of racist thought were revealed to all in the mid-twentieth century through the example of the Nazi regime. The post-Second World War revelations about the Holocaust and the extremes to which banal race-based assumptions could lead thoroughly discredited race theories. As I argue in the following chapter, this move away from biological race-based thinking had an effect on how the Métis were depicted in Canadian literature in subsequent decades. Texts written in the mid-twentieth century show greater concern for the position of the Métis as marginalized not by a racial taint or flaw as such, but by the social stigma and exclusion that resulted from that imagined taint. That is, the flaw is revealed to derive from the social policing of race that had obsessed people intent on building Western Canadian society during the settler years.

CHAPTER III

MÉTISSAGE AS SOCIAL STIGMA IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

The arc of Métis history has been characterized as comprising four periods: "(1) formation, (2) a 'Golden Age', (3) defeat, dispersal and relative impoverization, and (4) a recent resurgence" (Kienetz 4). In the previous chapter, I examined texts produced in the early part of the third period, after the defeat of 1885 but before the full effects of impoverishment and marginalization had been recognized. The Métis had not been completely assimilated into white or Native society as official policy and commonplace ideas of métissage had assumed would happen, but their socioeconomic position in Western Canada had changed fundamentally. Patrick Douaud suggests that the change can be explained by a shift in the relative power of their ancestral groups: "The Metis drew their originality from the fusion of two cultures that formerly were non-static and interacting," but by the mid-twentieth century, "one of them [had] become more static under the repression of the other" (15). The Métis were the byproduct and, in a sense, the gauge of a healthy interaction between groups that were open to each other and willing to change. As we saw in Chapter Two, the openness and adaptability that newcomers displayed during the fur-trade era ended with the settlement period in Western Canada. Driven primarily by an acquisitive desire for land, the new settlers and the government under which they operated began asserting control rather than interacting with Indigenous people in the interests of mutually beneficial development. The consolidation of colonial control, and the assumption that the assimilation of Indian peoples would go forward as a natural process, drained away the middle-ground ethos that had given rise to the Métis. Van Kirk laments that "It is unfortunate that, in terms of its racial ties, the early world of the fur trade became 'a world we have lost'" under the impact of white cultural values and prejudices, "for the blending of European and Indian culture could have been an enriching human experience" (*"Many Tender Ties"* 204, 205).

The texts examined in this chapter date from the mid-twentieth century: Marguerite Primeau's *Dans le muskeg* (1960), Mort Forer's *The Humback* (1969), Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), and Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977). They demonstrate a growing awareness of the repression being exerted on the Métis by white society and a recognition that the results were as destructive for mainstream society as they were for the Métis. The boosterism of the previous decades was replaced by a mood of reassessment that began in the 1950s,[46] a tendency to question the old colonial verities and to regret the negative effects on its victims. So white authors – both Francophone and Anglophone – act as the conscience of the society to which they belong, raising awareness that the frenetic period of Canadian nation-building and the push for "progress" at all costs have entailed dire consequences for a group that had hitherto been forgotten precisely because it did not fit into the worldview imposed by colonial self-assurance. As Douaud notes, "the Metis have been 'forgotten' [...] because in an industrial society which has some difficulty comprehending social or ideological overlaps and which seeks to impose clear-cut, distinctive labels on all its members, no one knows exactly on which side the Metis are. For some they are Europeanized Indians, for others Indianized Whites" (15). It is this notion of mutually exclusive "sides" that the Métis have been forced to negotiate and that constitutes the fundamental challenge to the recognition and acceptance of métissage.

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[46] In English-Canadian literature, the turning point is marked by the production of John Coulter's play *Riel* in 1950 (Braz 95) and the publication of Joseph Kinsey Howard's *Strange Empire* in 1952 (Braz 130-32).

Sociologist Jean Legasse contends, furthermore, that in the first half of the twentieth century, the Métis had come to be defined not only by their racial background but also by their social status. In a study he conducted in 1958, Legasse found that "There are two components to each definition of the Métis: heredity and way of life. To be classified as Métis a person must have some Indian ancestry. [...] A second condition to being classified as a Métis is living under poor circumstances" (par. 28). The attachment of class status to ethnic status meant that people who wished to escape the former would also necessarily lose the latter. The change that views of the Métis have undergone in Canada can be gauged by the fact that identifying as Métis no longer entails assumptions about class: since the 1960s, it has been possible to gain a secondary education and rise on the social ladder without feeling social pressure to stop identifying as Métis (Lussier, "Contemporary" 13).

Perhaps because they were more distanced from the integrationist pressures of Anglophone society, some Franco-Métis showed fewer signs of having "forgotten" their own heritage during this period. In part, that was because they maintained pride in their nineteenth-century ancestors. In addition, precisely because they were Francophones, the Franco-Métis may have had less opportunity to melt quietly into white society, as many of the more prosperous Anglo-Métis did.[47] The history of the nineteenth-century military conflicts, which was suppressed and then "rediscovered" in English Canada, remained a part of the consciousness of many Franco-Métis and were expressed by Western French-Canadians such as the members of the *Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba*.[48] Past glories continued to be recounted as part of the oral tradition (though often within the confines of Métis families), a tradition that is reflected in small part by published texts such as the memoirs of Auguste Vermette and Louis Goulet and short newspaper articles by Manie Tobie on Métis customs.[49]

The authors investigated in this chapter are all white Canadians (of varied ethnic backgrounds) whose representations demonstrate a recognition that the Métis are an important part of the Canadian mosaic. Their narratives reflect the idea that *ethnicity* is now seen as something that can be attributed to the Métis. The biology-based view of mixed race that had dominated earlier views of the Métis gave way to a sociological and ethnological interpretation. The earlier view that métissage was entirely determined by heredity through "blood" and that the social conditions of the Métis were solely a consequence of that heredity was replaced by an understanding that racism and class-based prejudices were major factors in creating the social conditions with which the Métis had to contend. Physical anthropologist Jean Benoist observes that métissage is not an objective or singular biological fact, but a social construction that is effected by paying attention to some biological differences and ignoring others: "En ne prenant pas en considération certaines différences et en attachant de l'importance à d'autres, c'est [la société] qui va dire ce qui est 'métissage' et ce qui ne l'est pas. Au sein du continuum des flux géniques définis par leur intensité et par leur origine, elle va pratiquer un découpage" (539). Studying racial métissage really means studying the sociological effects of the biological fiction of race and mixed race. And like any fiction, this one is subject to reinterpretation.

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[47] Van Kirk sees a tendency toward such integration even before 1870 in the mixed-blood families of HBC officers at Red River (*"Many Tender Ties"* 200-01).

[48] See the article by L.A. Prud'homme, for example, which was first published in 1921; the *Union nationale* was also responsible for publishing Trémaudan's history of the Métis nation in 1936. In a study confirming the tendency for English mixed-blood people to assimilate into English-Canadian society, Sylvia Van Kirk examines the experience of one prominent Anglophone mixed-blood family and concludes that "after 1870 the Anglophone mixed-bloods rapidly ceased to be recognized as a separate indigenous group, and *métis* has become the label which has tended to subsume all of the mixed-blood people of western Canada" ("'What if Mama?'" 216).

[49] See Barkwell, Dorion and Préfontaine (20-21) for a list of published oral accounts. Vermette's recollections of Métis life were recorded and published by Marcien Ferland in the 1980s, when Vermette was in his 90s; Goulet's memories of life on the prairies in the late nineteenth century were contained in writings that were recorded before his death in 1936 but that were not published until 1976. Armando Jannetta discusses the memoirs of George William Sanderson, Louis Goulet, and Ted Trindell in one chapter of his book on Métis literature.

In literary terms, then, these authors are displaying the same sort of ideological change that had taken place in anthropology, where the revolution triggered by Franz Boas beginning in the early twentieth century led to a focus on cultures as mutable products of human activities rather than as sets of innate, unchanging characteristics (Lewis 453-54; Taguieff 144-45). In the first half of the twentieth century the view among most Canadian groups was that the Métis did not have a culture and did not constitute a separate racial or ethnic group. That view was of course not shared by Métis who had managed to maintain their communities, who logically tended to regard themselves as having a distinct, living culture. According to mainstream views, however, the Métis were defined solely in terms of race and class as a socioeconomic group characterized by mixed Indian and white ancestry, an Indian lifestyle (i.e., living at least in part from hunting and trapping), and poverty (which was reflected by the fact that many families earned a subsistence living). Indeed, historian Nicole St. Onge explains that for the Métis, the parallel between socioeconomic status and ethnoracial identity was so solidly established that changing the first entailed changing the second: "In the 20th century, 'Métis' came to be synonymous with being poor, unschooled, living in a shack, or engaged in a variety of seasonal employments [...]. Once an individual or a family was enmeshed in this cycle of poverty, a theory of racial determination was invoked: Métis were poor because of inherited characteristics" (4). The novels I examine here turn sympathetic attention to the attitudes that relegated the Métis to marginalization and poverty – that is, the sociological effects of mixed race – while also drawing attention to the existence of the Métis as an ethnic group that has been wrongly neglected by Canadians.

Clearly, as white authors, Primeau, Forer, Laurence, and Wiebe could not depict Métis life "from the inside." That observation, which seems self-evident, is necessary because in the past two decades it has become central to discussions of Native literature and representations. In short, the standard view is the one expressed by Terry Goldie that all representations of Indigenous peoples by white colonizers are really the product of a semiotic process of intertextual reproduction in which "the signifier, the image here presented, does not lead back to the implied signified, the racial group usually termed Indian or Amerindian, but rather to other images" (*Fear and Temptation* 3-4), so that "Each representation of the indigene is a signifier for which the signified is the image.

The referent has little purpose in the equation" (4). According to Goldie, these intertextual images are actually indirect *self*-representations of authors of European heritage rather than accurate representations of Indigenous others, a stance that has been forcefully challenged by Sam McKegney (36-46).

I would argue that representations of the Métis require a somewhat different approach, since prior to the 1960s, the Métis were not actually considered "aboriginal" people or "indigenes" *per se* – they were something else, but something whose definition has perplexed writers and readers since the early nineteenth century. The Métis depicted in novels by the non-Métis authors in this chapter are recognizably part of the social space that those authors themselves occupied. They are neither the tragic "others" depicted by a D.C. Scott nor the sort of mythological isolated individual that Howard O'Hagan created in *Tay John*. In *Dans le muskeg* and *The Diviners* in particular, the Métis are part of the white communities of Avenir and Manawaka. Granted, in both novels the Métis are marginalized to some extent, but they nevertheless play a central role in the stories these authors wish to tell. With hindsight we can see that, because they do not have access to the "inside" of the Métis reality they are evoking, they do not provide us with the sort of firsthand view of ethnicity that has now become the norm in Canadian literature. Bearing in mind the period in which these writers were working, however, we must acknowledge their artistry for what it yielded, and not reject it because it fails to live up to an ideal that developed later – an ideal for which they laid the foundation by the very fact of raising readers' awareness of a "forgotten" part of Canadian reality.

In contrast to those two novels, *The Humback* and *The Scorched-Wood People* feature Métis communities, one in mid-century Manitoba and the other dating from almost a century earlier, focusing on Riel and the Métis at Red River and Batoche. In juxtaposition, the two texts demonstrate striking contrasts: Wiebe's Métis are powerful and sure of themselves as the centre of their world; Forer's Métis (who, tellingly, are never directly identified as Métis) subsist in a shadow existence where community coherence is defined negatively rather than positively. The inhabitants of the Humback seem to be trapped into a collective existence that is often destructive rather than nurturing, one that leaves them vulnerable to the depredations of those white people with whom they come into contact.

Dans le muskeg: Missed Opportunity

In *Dans le muskeg* (1960), Marguerite Primeau tells the story of Avenir, a Francophone community in northern Alberta, from 1919 through to the beginning of new prosperity and modernity in the years after World War II. The main protagonist, and the character through whose eyes most of the action is focalized, is Joseph Lormier, a young teacher who arrives from Québec in 1919. Over the years, Lormier comes to exercise considerable power in the community and gradually becomes obsessed with maintaining its Francophone "purity." As Pamela Sing points out, Primeau's subject is still topical today (which may explain why the Éditions des Plaines saw fit to reprint the novel 45 years later), since Primeau addresses the question, "comment une culture minoritaire peut-elle réussir à résister à l'assimilation à la culture majoritaire tout en s'ouvrant aux autres?" (Préface 9). The problem is that some "others" are finally embraced by the French-Canadian community in the novel's dénouement while the Métis remain outside the community or are merely tolerated.

At the outset of the novel, the marginal position of the Métis is not immediately evident. Lormier encounters Antoinette Bolduc during the train trip north from Edmonton after his arrival in Alberta: "Il se retourna et aperçut tout d'abord une chevelure blonde et bouclée. Puis deux yeux noirs, un nez busqué, des pommettes avivées par le fard, une bouche en coeur. Une robe rouge collait aux hanches de la jeune métisse" (Primeau 25). The blonde hair attracts Lormier, and he realizes that "sa main droite s'était inconsciemment allongée vers les boucles dorées" (25). This luxuriant golden hair stands as Antoinette's defining feature throughout the rest of the narrative, an unmistakable sign of métissage when coupled with the "bronze" skin (23) indicative of Indian ancestry. The mixing of European and Indian features establishes the proximate otherness of the Métis: in some ways they are 'other' to Euro-Canadians yet by the same token they are 'same.' This physical sign of métissage is indexical of other – cultural – differences that are not so easily read by an outsider. In the event, Lormier is alarmed by his gesture and pulls away, foreshadowing a series of similar movements toward and then away from Antoinette, a physical manifestation of the ambivalence that eventually leads to his acquiescence with insidiously racist treatment of the Métis.

Primeau does not stop at indicating physical difference to explain the gulf between whites and Métis. Emily, the Métis servant of the Catholic missionary, thinks of Lormier as a "monsieur" and realizes that he is outside of her circle of possibilities for a mate: “Elle regretta un moment de n’être pas complètement blanche. La vie aurait été si belle aux côtés d’un monsieur instruit” (32). This seems to indicate that for Emily, race itself is the main barrier between them. Yet a few moments later, she thinks of her sister Talma and Tom Lalonde, the trapper who “n’avait pas hésité à épouser une métisse” (32). This reminder indicates that the obstacle she is facing is more a class barrier than a race barrier. A white man who is a trapper – on the lower end of the Euro-Canadian social scale and a holdover from pre-settlement times – is evidently low enough in social status to marry a Métis woman. In this way, Primeau delves into the complexities of the Métis position in the early twentieth century, where mixed race becomes equated with low class ranking. Indeed, her narrative shows how it was that the Métis could have been reduced to an under-class in fairly short order as they quickly lost ground relative to the newcomers to the prairies.

The main representative of virulent racism in the novel is Florentine Ducharme, whose bitterness is understood to stem from the early deaths of all of her children. Immediately upon meeting Lormier, she demonstrates her bigoted mindset and the way in which she seeks to infect others with it. She warns Lormier that his Métis pupils, the L’Hirondelle children, are “menteurs, voleurs et pouilleux” (54) and casts her warning as that of a veteran who is merely looking out for an unsuspecting novice who could easily be taken in by Métis wiles. On the first day of class, Lormier sees “trois ou quatre enfants déguenillés, pas très propres, qui semblaient attendre le premier bruit insolite pour s’enfuir” (55). Again, it is not clear at this point whether Florentine Ducharme’s prejudice is caused by the racial difference or the poverty of the Métis, because the two have become so closely associated that one entails the other.

Lormier's own budding prejudice, the one that will become the reigning force in his life, is against the "cosmopolitanism" of ethnic plurality. He has come west to escape its spread in Eastern cities and idealizes the simple farmers of Avenir as a force to be reckoned with in the future, provided they are "bien dirigés" (62). Needless to say, Lormier is eager to take up the task of guiding them according to his dyed-in-the-wool ideology of exclusion, based on the idea that "le peuple canadien-français jouerait un grand rôle dans l'histoire, à condition de se tenir à l'écart de tout ce qui était étranger à sa langue, à sa foi et à ses traditions" (63).

Still, Lormier has not yet come to exclude the Métis from his French-Canadian in-group or to accept Florentine Ducharme's condemnation of them wholesale. He recognizes the young Frank L'Hirondelle's gift for drawing and encourages him to pursue it. When he meets Antoinette again at the Christmas dance, the two form a connection that is heading toward courtship and marriage. This juncture leads to the first major turning point in the novel: Lormier is prepared to marry Antoinette and thus begin breaking down the class barriers between the people of Avenir and the Métis. He is willing to accept them as part of the French-Canadian people he values so highly, just as do many of the people of Avenir.

Once again, Ducharme intervenes to prevent a marriage that she sees as improper. Rather than speaking directly about Antoinette, she aims at Lormier's weak point by suggesting that Avenir's future is being threatened by the Métis, who are planning to sell their farms to Anglo-Canadians. Her explanation of why they would sell their farms plays on the notion that the Métis cannot be trusted: "Pourquoi? Pour rien, parce qu'ils sont métis. Faut pas chercher à comprendre. Un beau jour, ils décident qu'ils en ont assez d'être civilisés, et ils repartent, comme ça, pour aller vivre en sauvages loin des blancs. Voyez-vous, Monsieur Lormier, on ne peut pas se fier à eux. On pense les avoir civilisés, et quand on s'y attend le moins ils plient bagages et disparaissent" (114). This is the classic discourse of stereotyping, in which individual families – the Beauregards, Ladouceurs, and L'Hirondelles – are stripped of their particularity as individual people experiencing specific circumstances and lumped into a general "they" about which the speaker claims authoritative knowledge.

The insidious side of stereotypes is, of course, that they sometimes contain a grain of truth that gives them the colour of accuracy. A closer examination demolishes the assumptions that seem to justify the stereotype, but such examination is precluded or short-circuited by the very situation in which stereotypes are retailed. In this case, Ducharme is describing behaviour that is reminiscent of the traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Métis in northern Alberta, where

> people lived in log and mud houses; net fishing on a private basis was forbidden by law, but they availed of line fishing, which was allowed in summer. There was little hunting and trapping available in the immediate vicinity of the lake, a fact which forced the men to seek intermittent wage

> labor working on roads or cutting timber. In the summer, the people moved closer to the lake and lived in tents or wickiups. (Douaud 21)[50]

Because Primeau makes a point of signalling when Ducharme is wilfully distorting the truth, something that she does not do in this instance, we can assume that the woman's characterization of Métis behaviour and motivations as a reversion to "sauvage" ways is likely a result of ignorance. She does not consider the Métis important enough to be informed about their lifestyle or traditions, whereas the racist stereotype serves her purposes of denigrating the Métis and undermining their position in the community.

Lormier's reaction illustrates how a stereotype can be effective even when the listener has experience that should refute it: Ducharme tells him that she has learned "by chance" that the families in question had been to the land agent's office. Without questioning whether her statement is true or imagining that there could be other reasons for the visit (the sort of benefit of the doubt that he might extend to other community members), Lormier jumps to the conclusion Ducharme is aiming for. Since his friends, the Beauregards, had said nothing about visiting the land office, Lormier uses faulty reasoning to suppose that "C'était donc vrai qu'on ne pouvait se fier à eux, qu'ils étaient sauvages et qu'ils demeuraient envers et contre tout?" (115). That Lormier could so easily question people he has befriended is a sign of a fatal character flaw that may in part be attributable to his tendency toward social deference: in spite of his education and his teacher's advice that he should remain open to everything the country has to offer (20),

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[50] This information is summarized from pages 1261-62 in Vol. 2 of Giraud.

Lormier allows himself to be too easily manipulated by a woman whom he believes solely because of her status in the community. As Sing points out, in doing so, Lormier is following "le critère de la pureté raciale soutenu par le discours nationaliste patriarchal" ("Préface" 11) as contained in his grandfather's parting words that Lormier should have nothing to do with "les sauvages" (Primeau 19).

To achieve her ultimate purpose by breaking up the relationship between Lormier and Antoinette, Ducharme follows up with a declaration that the Métis are given to promiscuity, slyly introducing the story of Antoinette's mother Laura Bolduc, a single mother who was abandoned by Antoinette's father. Ironically, Antoinette's very attractiveness confirms for Lormier that she fits the stereotype of promiscuity: "Il revit le sourire entendu de la jeune fille, son petit buste en avant, ses hanches qui ondoyaient pour attirer les regards" (115). This recollection links back to Lormier's first impression of Antoinette as a lively young blonde woman dressed in a tight dress and high heels whom he finds immediately attractive (25-26). Even though Antoinette has subsequently worked to conform to a more sober French identity, Lormier nonetheless accepts the false truth of the stereotype over the truth of his own judgement about Antoinette's worthiness as a potential wife.

Having achieved her purpose, Ducharme reveals the deep racism that underlies her determination to thwart the relationship between Lormier and Antoinette: "Pourtant, non! ça ne se passerait pas ainsi. Il n'y aurait pas de sang mêlé chez les enfants du maître d'école d'Avenir. Si le jeune fou tenait absolument à se marier, qu'il aille se trouver quelqu'un de sa race, pas une métisse!" (122). Her possessive attitude toward the "maître d'école d'Avenir" shows that her supposed altruism is not aimed at protecting the individual from métissage: in her eyes, she is protecting the community itself by ensuring that "its" schoolmaster will not have mixedblood children. Likewise, we see that no such prohibition is exerted against Tom Lalonde, or against the moonshine-maker Popol, whose Indian wife is the subject of humorous anecdotes shared by the male members of the community who do business with Popol. Neither Tom nor Popol is deemed important enough in the community to pose a threat by entering into a racially mixed marriage. At the same time, the narrative seems to endorse the prohibition against producing children through mixed-race marriages, since neither couple has any children. The only Métis children present in the narrative are the product of endogamous métissage.

This portrait of Florentine Ducharme as a woman full of racist bile is in itself important, because it reveals the ugly reality behind the attitudes that led to rejection and oppression of the Métis by the white majority, including by Francophones who might have been presumed to be sensitive to exclusionary practices but instead are quite willing to exert their own forms of exclusion. What is more significant here, however, is Primeau's illustration of the ways in which those attitudes can radiate out to others and influence their thinking and actions. The power of prejudice does not lie in finding fellow-thinkers to share it; it need only find acquiescent minds that are willing to passively accept it. So Lormier muses resignedly that "Il n'aimait pas madame Ducharme, mais si ce qu'elle disait des métis et de Linda Bolduc était vrai, et cela avait tout l'air d'être vrai, il valait mieux partir immédiatement" (122). He leaves for Québec immediately and in the interests of "notre belle race canadienne-française" (121), from which the Métis have been subtly ejected, returns two months later with several new families of Québécois settlers and a new wife.

Given the centrality of the Métis theme as a barometer of the nationalistic temperature of Avenir, one might have expected the final crisis in the novel to revolve around them. Instead, Primeau introduces an Anglophone "villain" to precipitate the climax. In fact, the Anglophone is a Catholic Irishman, Patrick O'Malley, who is happy to have his son educated in French, reasoning that this will help him later when dealing with a French-speaking clientele. That he would be perceived as a single-handed threat to Avenir is a sign of the sense of paranoia that accompanies the drive for ethnic minority survival – after all, it is O'Malley whose economic activity helps ensure the survival of the community. Fittingly, the final crisis arises when Lormier's daughter Lucette falls in love with Tommy O'Malley, Patrick's son. Both men refuse their permission and enter into a monumental battle of wills that is resolved only after the community comes together in its efforts to save the Catholic church from fire.

The conflagration puts into new perspective the decision by Lucette and Tommy to defy their fathers and marry. As the marriage ceremony takes place, Lormier again recalls Antoinette, the woman he loved and should have married: "Une fois de plus, l'image de la métisse blonde qui'il avait aimée comme il n'avait jamais pu aimer depuis, passa devant ses yeux" (285). His awareness of having missed his opportunity for love because of misguided prejudice finally prompts him to accept his daughter's choice. As Sing points out, this resolution of the conflict between cultural openness and cultural survival foregrounds the notion of reconciliation between Canada's "two founding nations" rather than a multiculturalism that encompasses the Métis on their home ground: "À la fin, Lormier assouplit les barrières lui ayant servi à compartimenter les identités, mais sa manière de faire favorise plus le bilinguisme 'canadien' officiel que l'épanouissement d'une francophonie propre au Far-Ouest" (Préface 12). The novel's pro-diversity message fails to suggest a way in which the Métis might become part of the new dispensation. The Irish businessman has insinuated himself into the heart of community life while the Métis, who have been present all along, remain on the margins.

The ending of the book leaves the Métis of Avenir in a status quo position – not entirely excluded, but not fully embraced either. In the final scene between Lormier and Antoinette, Primeau suggests that the positions have switched and that it is the French-Canadian who is now rejected by the Métisse. Full of regret about his past choices, Lormier happens to meet Antoinette by the river and, attempting to express the depth of his love for her, he grabs her and begins kissing her:

> Mais Antoinette s'était ressaisie. Elle le repoussa violemment en lui disant:
>
> — Lucette et sa mère vous attendent à la maison, M'sieu Lormier. Mon mari et mes enfants m'attendent, moi aussi. (272)

Like the reconciliation between Lormier and O'Malley, Antoinette's matter-of-fact rejection of Lormier's overture is symbolic of a larger state of affairs: that the desire of the Métis to be accepted by their white neighbours has not continued indefinitely. Years of being taken for granted, casually neglected, or actively rejected cannot be overcome by a single belated gesture expressing regret for past treatment or the desire for a renewed relationship.

That Primeau does not "solve" the problems of Métis/non-Métis relations that she explores in such detail and so perspicaciously is a sign of the author's awareness that this particular relationship is much more intractable than the relatively straightforward problem of French/English relations. The class parity between Lormier and O'Malley, and between Lucette and Tommy, is in the end more important than ethnic identity. The two young people meet at university where both are becoming professionals, an opportunity that the young L'Hirondelle will never have. Instead, that bright and gifted young man has had to make a living as a labourer in lumber camps.

So it is that the old prejudices shape the lives of the younger generation long after the people who perpetuated them are gone, by laying down social structures that gradually become "self-evident" (mythologies, in the Barthesian sense) and self-reproducing. By the post-war period in which the novel ends, the racist attitudes from the early twentieth century have become entrenched in the shape of class differences that create effective barriers between racially distinct segments of society. The result is a de facto confirmation of the message conveyed by Ralph Connor in *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*: that mixed marriages and métissage are outdated fur-trade phenomena that have no place in modern Canadian society.

In a novel published less than a decade later, Mort Forer tries something that no Anglo-Canadian had ever done: to write the story of a Manitoba Métis community that is isolated from white society, and therefore possibly far from the stigma that bedevils Métis living on the outskirts of white communities. Forer, who was a social worker before becoming a writer (Drainie 21), seems to have a strong grasp of the way of life he is describing in the community of the Humback. Yet the people he describes are even more vulnerable than the Métis in Primeau's novel, ostensibly because they have lost their collective identity.

The Humback: Cultural Amnesia

Set in eastern Manitoba, in a liminal space where the Western prairie meets the Canadian Shield, the action in *The Humback* (1969) takes place over the period of one year in the early 1960s. The lack of specific textual indicators of time, place, and even the ethnicity of the characters (who are never actually identified as Métis) creates a sense of eternity and inevitability about the situation of the Humbackers that, as I discuss below, is one of the most problematic aspects of the novel. Despite Forer's desire to heighten the temporal, spatial and cultural indeterminacy of his narrative, Canadian readers have no problem deciphering the geographical and ethnic indicators and thus placing the setting (east of Winnipeg) and the people: the French names of the characters and of Ste. Thérèse, the nearest small town, as well as the isolation of the Humback and vague references to an aboriginal past, provide clues that the people in question are Métis.

Forer's chapter divisions point to a stark gender divide in the life of the community: in "The Women," he describes an existence centred on child-bearing, child-rearing, and living on credit from the local store run by Abe Epp, one of the Humback's few white residents. The main female character is 'Toinette, a woman of forty who has given birth to seventeen children with a series of different men. She is an earth mother figure who plays a special nurturing role toward Lu-Cil, an orphaned epileptic girl, and toward her own daughter, Marie, who at sixteen has a baby daughter she insists is the product of a virgin birth. Yet all of 'Toinette's efforts to protect and sustain these young women are ineffectual: both of them die in the end, one the victim of sexual violence and the other in a car accident. These tragedies, as well as the endemic sexual abuse suggested throughout the narrative, show that the women are particularly vulnerable as a result of the weakening of social bonds. For "The Men," Forer describes a pattern of seasonal work in a lumber camp in the winter, followed by a few months in the settlement during which the men rest, party, and father children with their respective wives or partners.

Forer is astute at delineating the relations between the Humbackers and the institutions of neo-colonial authority that hem them in: commerce (the storekeeper Abe Epp), religion (the Catholic priest, Father Dufresne), the forces of order (the RCMP detachment), education (the white schoolteacher, Miss Langois), and the government (represented mainly by the Welfare department, which is known only for taking women's children away when they are in trouble). The white world is also represented by "the city," which the women and children visit once a year to go trick-or-treating at Hallowe'en, and into which young people occasionally disappear when they want to escape the Humback.

The attitudes of many of these institutions are also indicated: Epp thinks of his store and compound as "his kingdom" and of the Humbackers, reluctantly, as "his people" (90). The women at the Convent see the Humback as "Gomorrah" (54), an idea that Marie promotes by inventing salacious stories to feed their preconception. Father Dufresne has no interest in trying to improve the lives of the Humbackers. Instead, he is obsessed with discovering who is the father of Marie's baby, since her story amounts to heresy. After Marie's death, the priest takes a secret pleasure in returning to announce the news to 'Toinette. Avid to witness scenes of sorrow, he is thwarted by 'Toinette's and Joshua's stoic reserve (302).

A veteran RCMP officer's attitude toward the Humback illustrates yet another facet of the combined pressures that go into making the Métis a forgotten people: "At the Humback, his aim had been always to minimize the meaning of this community in the world. He would never search out trouble there. He would only try to contain it" (112). The idea of "containing" a group that is viewed as threatening mainstream society with racial "contagion" fits with the traditional racist views of métissage. Going beyond simplistic racism, however, Forer insightfully points to the need of mainstream society to contain the *meaning* of this community. Because the western Canadian society the RCMP officer represents does not wish to have its moral superiority questioned, his task is to contain the community's implicit message about moral compromise, or even moral bankruptcy, that would undermine the self-regard of a society whose privileges and comforts are based on the continued efficacy of colonial arrangements.

The obverse side of this containment is isolation, which is the only protection this Métis settlement has, given the general background of malignant neglect, if not outright hostility, from the outside world. That isolation is shattered when the forest to the east catches fire and the settlement becomes the headquarters for a crew of white firefighters.

The disastrous result is Lu-Cil's murder during a sexual assault by one of the crew members. The horror of the death is heightened by the fact that no one ever finds out about it: everyone assumes that Lu-Cil, like other girls before her, has disappeared into the city. Only 'Toinette fears something worse, but does not have the power to convince anyone to help search for the girl (236-38). So the most marginalized member of a marginalized group is forgotten: her death does not register in the least on the life of the community.

The most fully developed character in the book is Epp, whose business is central to the lives of both the men and women of the Humback. He hires the men to carry out government contracts and pays them by keeping a book in which their wages are credited. The women in turn depend on their partners' credit entries to buy groceries and other essential items throughout the year. The omniscient narration enables us to see the attitudes of Epp and the Humbackers toward each other. The contradictions between their viewpoints are a source of irony and constitute a major part of the critique of neocolonialism. Although the priest and the RCMP officers see Epp as a member of their camp and expect him to act as informer for them, he secretly refuses to play that role, telling himself after a conversation with the RCMP Corporal that "I won't call you, and I won't call the Priest either" (111). Yet his position is ambiguous, since his defiance could derive as much from a sense of territoriality or "ownership" of the Humback as from a sense of solidarity with "his people."

In fact, Epp inhabits his own private liminal space, neither completely in the white world nor completely in the world of the Humback. Nevertheless, he believes that the men should be grateful to him for the work and income he provides them. He is therefore alarmed and bewildered when the men, angry that their working season has been cut short by the high fire hazard in the forest, take it out on Epp by urinating on his door. The women, too, sometimes resent Epp, whose economic control over their lives means dependence as well as opportunity: "Georgette was chained to the storekeeper's book figures and his apparent whims and his additions and subtractions. So were they all, at the Humback. But to most of them, these chains meant security. Only a few of them now and then rattled the irons, and then only at the thought of independence" (32). It is unclear why independence should be a negligible reason for wanting to break away from Epp's credit system. Forer repeatedly comes close to identifying a major underlying issue, only to back away from it. That frustrating pattern is consistent with what the author seems to consider one of the main characteristics of these people: they have only limited insight into their own situation and are therefore doomed to remain trapped within it, barely subsisting. The diffident tone of the omniscient narration suggests that the inhabitants of the Humback are inexorably caught up in a situation they are powerless to change.

The only Métis character who shows any measure of insight into that situation is sixty-five-year-old Joshua, a singer and story-teller who talks about a brighter, freer past "when men like us grew out of the backs of horses" and "when people like us collected in the fall like a flock of geese and rode out west for a thousand miles to hunt the buffalo" (129). Unlike the specific historical knowledge that we will see in Margaret Laurence's Métis characters, Joshua's historical information is vague. He describes a powerful man "who could hear the horses gallop a whole ten miles before they came" and "could see through walls" (129). The man's identity becomes clear only when the storyteller specifies that "Later they hung the man who could see through walls, and that was the end of people like us. After that, we scattered like thistledown in the wind" (130). The fact that Louis Riel is not named has two important implications, both inside and outside the text: intratextually, it suggests the tenuous nature of the historical memory Joshua is passing on. Without a name, the legend of Riel appears destined to lose its power over time and therefore is incapable of underpinning future community pride or action. Extratextually, it absolves white readers from reflecting on the specific history of the Métis and Riel. Like Riel, the Métis have no name in this narrative: they are referred to only as "Humbackers" or, as Joshua says, "people like us."

While Joshua's story does instil a sense of pride in his male listeners, it is merely a fleeting state of mind: "Joshua had redrawn for [the men] their human forms with broad strokes of past dignity. Once again he had assured them they were people without shame. And with this feeling of good, they could end the day" (130). Joshua is doing his best to play the role of Métis elders who "counsel, support, and offer the benefits of their new experiences to those who wish to gain insight into how we can live as Métis in our contemporary world" (Leclair 161). Yet the "feeling of good" is ephemeral and unable to withstand the everyday grind of poverty and hopelessness. When Joshua attempts to tell his stories of the old days to an outsider, the man replies that "It's only today and tomorrow that counts. The old days, they're just bedtime stories for kids, that's all" (Forer 156). Métis history and memory, which would play a central role in the revival of Métis pride and activism, are discounted and silenced.

Forer may be incisively portraying how a culture dies through the loss of collective memory, but he seems to be "blaming the victims," in a sense, for failing to find the resources to improve their situation. After a trivial confrontation with the RCMP, Leo expresses the dissatisfaction he feels in making such useless gestures of defiance, complaining to Joshua that "You can't ever lick them, can you" (116). Joshua's reply encapsulates the man's perhaps realistic, but ineffectual, insight: "There's ways [...]. But I don't think we know them yet" (116). As a message of hope or defiance, this is muted indeed. The word "yet" gives a hint that things may change, but the fact that the comment is delivered in a whisper is indicative that the community's only leader feels bereft of the power to help his people in their current circumstances.

Not surprisingly, given the overall negative impression left of the Humback people, Emma LaRocque condemns the novel as "a horror tale of tragedy and babies" ("Métis" 89). That observation is aimed at 'Toinette in particular, who believes that her main purpose in life is to produce children. She applies a similar philosophy in the face of death: after Marie and her baby are killed in a car accident, she suggests to Joshua that they should have a child together, because "Kids is good" (314) and, as Joshua says, "Every time something dies, [...] there should be something new to take its place" (315). Once again, Forer raises a note of guarded optimism for the future, only to negate it in his last line, in which 'Toinette pronounces that "we'll call [the new baby] Marie" (315). The name stands as either a portent of doom or a sign of stubborn endurance, since this child will inherit the name that 'Toinette has already given to three girls, all of whom have died.

In a review of *The Humback*, Rudy Wiebe states that Forer's choice of a Métis subject is the strongest part of the novel ("Pushed" 86), representing a wealth of material that has been neglected by "major" Canadian literature. Perhaps reflecting the distinction in the critics' subject positions, Wiebe identifies Forer's main weakness differently from LaRocque. As a Métis critic, LaRocque focuses on the representation of the Métis as such, charging Forer with depicting "the biological ability to make babies as some sort of desperate symbol of endurance" while saying "nothing of the Métis' spiritual and cultural endurance" ("Metis" 90). Wiebe, a non-Métis critic and writer, sees Forer's main flaw as his failure to assign responsibility for the desperate situation he paints in such detail. As Wiebe puts it, "how great a novel can arise out of the attitude 'nobody can't help nuttin'?" ("Pushed" 87).

Forer's failure to link the current desperation of the Métis with the historical forces responsible for it is exemplified in the first chapter, all of two pages long, in which he describes the physical environment of the Humback and the road that runs nearby: "It had been cut to carry the trampings of a westbound army of avenging soldiers. Which it did. But since revenge is bordered only at its beginning, the road never carried an army returning to the east" (12). This powerful image linking the present-day Humback and Wolseley's army forging a road west in order to put down the Métis action at Red River could have provided the foundation for a better understanding of why the people of the Humback are in such bad straits. In essence, they are continuing to live as a subjected people under an order established by a colonial army that never left, and whose work has been continued by its sister institutions of colonial control. As in the story of Riel, however, the lack of specific names that would place these events within a particular context and lay some responsibility at the feet of white Westerners and the Canadian government removes any bite that these observations might have for a white reader. The final outcome, even if unintended, is the same sort of containment and deprivation of meaning for the Métis that Forer ascribes to the RCMP corporal.

Because his Métis community is largely isolated from white society, Forer does not depict the day to day interactions between those groups that illustrate the workings of social stigmatization. Yet, as I have emphasized, this community is extremely vulnerable despite its isolation and close-knit relationships. That vulnerability can be attributed in part to the community's economic situation, but above all, it seems to stem from a lack of spiritual depth, traditions, or collective memory. Although Forer fails to examine the very situation he points to, he has clearly understood that it is a lack of cultural resources, rather than economic resources, that constitutes the greatest loss for the Métis of the Humback.

The contrast with Margaret Laurence's treatment of similar material is striking. The fatalism that Forer may have felt was a realistic portrait of a struggling community is unsatisfactory as a fictional treatment of the Métis theme. His detailed knowledge of the sociology and psychology of poverty, as well as his hesitation to ground the story more concretely in Métis history, seem to have prevented him from recognizing any of the spiritual or cultural resources that the Métis were actually bringing to bear on their own lives. Laurence, who started working on *The Diviners* two years after *The Humback* was published (Powers 364, 371), did not hesitate to use specific names and details to place her characters much more concretely in the history of Western Canada. She names Riel as the Métis martyr, and Lazarus Tonnerre, her Métis elder character, is even more destitute than Joshua, but he has the true power of a storyteller passing on a proud history to the next generation. Most importantly, that generation is represented by a young man who takes those lessons and builds on them in a story of Métis revival rather than stasis or continuing decline.

The Diviners: Memory Restored

In a set of four novels and one short story sequence known as the Manawaka novels,[51] Margaret Laurence introduces the Métis Tonnerre family, which gains greater visibility in the narratives before becoming central to *The Diviners* (1974), the last novel in the series. Set in the fictional Manitoba town of Manawaka (modelled on her hometown of Neepawa) from the 1920s to the 1960s, *The Diviners* is told mainly in third-person with strong focalization by the protagonist, Morag Gunn, a writer who at the age of 47 is looking back over her life in an attempt to "define her own individual identity within her communities" (Dudek 247). Central to Morag's life is her relationship with Jules Tonnerre, the Métis man with whom she develops a relationship as a teenager and who, as her lover later in life, is the father of their daughter, Pique.

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[51] *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), *A Bird in the House* (1970) (a collection of short stories), and *The Diviners* (1974).

A number of critics have noted the instrumental role played in the novel by Jules Tonnerre. Leslie Monkman points out that "Jules Tonnerre emerges not only as a character whose suffering is a standard by which Morag Gunn can measure her own pain, but also an embodiment of the acceptance and freedom that are goals of each of Laurence's protagonists" (57). Angelika Maeser-Lemeiux applies a Jungian framework to analyze the Métis as mediators through which the white protagonist achieves a "transformed consciousness" that opens into "feminine spirituality" in contradistinction to repressed patriarchal psychology (129). Both Debra Dudek and Coral Ann Howells emphasize the need of Laurence's heroes to "create acceptable fictions" (Howells 37) that they can live with as Canadians. Furthermore, Dudek says that the Manawaka novels are "revolutionary in how they re-vision Canadian identity beyond a dual French-English identity" (248), in large part by emphasizing Métis identity. Oriana Palusci's discussion of the Métis theme in Laurence's writing provides references to useful secondary material from interviews with Laurence and archival material. Unfortunately, her article is marred by a number of problematic assertions, such as the idea that the "price" Laurence paid for demonstrating the symbolic importance of the Métis was "silence" as a writer, since *The Diviners* was her last novel (62, n. 8).

Yet it is important to remember that Laurence does much more with the Métis theme than to use it as an instrument of white self-discovery. It is for that reason that LaRocque has singled Laurence out as "the one [English-Canadian] author whose Métis characters seem plausible and human" ("Metis" 91). Jules Tonnerre is the conduit through which Laurence tells her readers about Métis history and about the destitute conditions in which many of them were living by the mid-twentieth century. More significantly, she shows that the Métis have as powerful and proud an ethnic identity as any of the groups asserting themselves in a country that has begun to embrace multiculturalism as an overriding cultural value

Part of the challenge Laurence must deal with in trying to convey the dire social conditions of the Métis is how to do so from a white perspective without sounding detached or even condescending. In "The Loons," one of the stories in *A Bird in the House*, the Tonnerres are described through the eyes of Vanessa, a white girl from Manawaka:

> The Tonnerres were French half-breeds, and among themselves they spoke a *patois* that was neither Cree nor French. Their English was broken and full of obscenities. They did not belong among the Cree of the Galloping Mountain reservation, further north, and they did not belong among the Scots-Irish and Ukrainians of Manawaka, either. [...] When their men were not working at odd jobs or as section hands on the C.P.R., they lived on relief. (114-15)

The story tells of a summer holiday during which Piquette Tonnerre accompanies Vanessa's family on the initiative of Vanessa's father, the town doctor, who is treating Piquette for tuberculosis in her leg bones. Given Vanessa's social status, there is very little connection between her and Piquette, someone with whom she can sympathize, but certainly not identify. The problem of a white author being unable to tell a Métis story from the inside is one that Laurence recognized and lamented, telling fellow writer and close friend Adele Wiseman that "I cannot *ever* write about another cultural and ethnic background from the inside. It cannot be done, or not by me, anyway. [...] This was a problem I had with *The Diviners*, and the Métis, obviously" (Lennox and Panofsky 378).

Laurence uses two devices to overcome the problem of the social and cultural gap between a white focalizer and Métis characters who are central to the narrative in *The Diviners*: firstly, she gives Morag Gunn a social status so low that she feels an instant (though initially disavowed) complicity with Jules Tonnerre as social outcast. Secondly, having brought these two characters into a social space where they can interact naturally, Laurence focuses on the parallel contents of ethnic identity – Scots-Canadian on Morag's side, Franco-Métis on Jules's – in order to cement the idea that such identity is a central part of all people's reality regardless of social status. In doing so, Laurence rejects and counteracts the sort of cultural nothingness that Forer depicted for the Métis of the Humback.

Morag begins with a social disadvantage in that she is an orphan. Even worse, her adoptive parents occupy the lowest possible rung of white society: Christie Logan is the garbage man, someone the town's children dub "the scavenger." His wife, Prin, is an obese, house-bound woman who is kind enough, but dresses Morag in outmoded clothing that attracts vicious teasing by her schoolmates. The three of them live on the wrong side of the tracks in a house that "smells like pee or something" (*Diviners* 29). As a coping mechanism, Morag becomes a tomboy and a tough girl. She recognizes that Jules ("Skinner") Tonnerre's toughness may the same sort of reaction to social stigma: "Skinner is thin and he has dark dark slanted eyes. He is always scowling. [...] Morag has always reckoned that he hated the other kids so much he never even noticed what they said about him and his gimpylegged sister and all of them [...]. Maybe Skinner does notice the passed remarks? Maybe he just doesn't let on. Like her." She immediately disavows the resemblance, telling herself that "He is *not* like her" (69), but a connection has already been made, foreshadowing the future relationship between the two.

As the class sings "The Maple Leaf Forever," Morag identifies one way in which she and Jules are quite different: she has an ethnic identity; he does not. She proudly recognizes the "thistle" in the song as a symbol of the Scots element in Canada, something that she knows about from Christie Logan's rousing tales about her ancestor Piper Gunn. Noticing that Jules is not singing in spite of his excellent voice, Morag realizes with her blunt perspicacity that the song is not for him, because "He comes from nowhere. He isn't anybody" (70). The artefacts of Canadian culture do not acknowledge or include the Métis: much of the rest of the novel is directed at refuting the message the young Morag receives from this nationalistic song. Through her relationship with Jules, she becomes the intermediary through which her English-Canadian readers can learn that the Métis do come from somewhere, and are somebody.

In this scene, Morag displays how ethnic identity acts as a consolation, providing a sense of pride and fullness of identity for even the most marginal members of a society. Her perception that Jules is devoid of such a source of pride reflects the mainstream Anglo-Canadian view of the time. The stories of Scottish heroes that Morag hears from Christie reinforce her sense of being part of a foundational ethnicity of English Canada (the term "English" having come to include English, Scots and Irish). In contrast, she can view the ethnically indeterminate Tonnerres as being even lower on the social ladder than she and the Logans:

> The Tonnerres (there are an awful lot of them) are called *those breeds*, meaning halfbreeds. They are part Indian, part French, from away back. They are mysterious. People in Manawaka talk about them but don't talk *to* them. Lazarus makes homebrew down there in the shack in the Wachakwa valley, and is often arrested on Saturday nights. Morag knows. She has heard. They are dirty and unmentionable. (69)

By using Morag's youthful voice to ventriloquize unabashedly the attitudes of mainstream society, Laurence provides a capsule description of Métis destitution and conveys the way in which condemnatory views are reproduced in successive generations to create an unbreakable cycle of marginalization.

Morag is eventually able to counteract the mainstream views because she is intelligent and independent-minded and because, quite simply, she does not belong to the mainstream. Her view of the Tonnerres begins to change when she starts talking *to* Jules after they meet by the Wachakwa River when Morag is fifteen (126). After another meeting a few years later, Morag accompanies Jules to his shack in the valley, where the two become lovers for the first time, and Morag meets the family patriarch, Lazarus (136-43). Jules tells Morag about the illustrious history of an ancestor, Rider Tonnerre, who fought alongside Riel. This alternative story about the Métis defeat at Batoche creates a counterpoint to the Scots version that Morag has heard from Christie.

Critics have correctly interpreted Laurence's illustration of Métis ethnic pride as a celebration of ethnic diversity (Dudek and Howells). Clearly, Laurence is intent on conveying her conviction that it is the role of writers to "give form to our past and relate it to our present and our future" ("Ivory Tower" 15). Yet it is also important to note that Laurence recognizes that a necessary transformation may also be part of that process. As a young girl, Morag is already rewriting Christie's story of Piper Gunn's woman, Morag's namesake, in order to imagine her in Canada as a female ancestor whose strength Morag can draw on, even if she is mainly imaginary (*Diviners* 52). In short, Morag reframes the ancestral figure within a Canadian context to make her more useful for the girl's understanding of her own Scots-Canadian identity. Clearly, this sort of "indigenization" is not required for the Métis material, which is already located in the land that became Manitoba, but the same process of mobilizing history for purposes of establishing a personal ethnic identity is at work in Lazarus's and Jules's stories of ancestors such as Rider Tonnerre, "who may have existed and maybe not" (368). In adulthood, Jules becomes a footloose musician who composes songs about Riel, the Métis, and his family. This material becomes an important part of the heritage that he passes on to his daughter Pique, who learns to play his songs and in turn begins composing her own.

To conclude that the Scottish and Métis mythologies presented in parallel in the novel add up to a presumption of ethnic equality in diversity would be misleading, however. The reader need only look at the "Album" of Jules's songs at the end of the novel to see that, ultimately, Métis identity is much more central to the novel than is Scots identity. Jules's song about his father Lazarus reflects the depths of degradation and despair that have overwhelmed the Métis, but it also has a powerful message of survival that is symbolized by Lazarus's name. In spite of his life of hardship, says the song,

> Lazarus he never slit his throat, there.
> Lazarus, he never met his knife.
> If you think that isn't news, just try walking in his shoes.
> Oh Lazarus, he kept his life, for life.
> [...] Lazarus, oh man, you didn't die. (463)

As a further sign of the power of Métis revival, Pique identifies with her father and decides to go to Galloping Mountain to be with her Métis relatives. Given that decision, it is difficult to understand Terry Goldie's suggestion that Pique "might be seen as the fruition of Native-white contact but could also be viewed as one more step in a deracinating chain" ("Fear" 77). The fruition of Native-white contact she certainly is, but her active efforts to follow in her father's footsteps as a Métis singer-songwriter and to live with her Métis relations is hardly a sign of "deracination."

Goldie's determination to interpret Laurence's narrative of interracial contact negatively is indicative of a general trend in Canadian literature criticism on Native (and particularly Métis) themes. The trend can best be illustrated through discussions of the deaths of Jules (who dies of cancer) and his sister Piquette. It is LaRocque who, despite her positive assessment of Laurence's novel, first points out that the Métis "are still portrayed as dying, though nobly" ("Metis" 91). Goldie elaborates on this idea to equate the fate of Jules with narratives of white-Indian contact in nineteenth-century American and Canadian literature, where liaisons between white men and Indian women are a means for male colonizers to "acquire Indian" ("Fear" 76), usually through some form of sexual contact. The pattern is reversed in *The Diviners*, says Goldie, with the relationship between a white woman and a Native man, but the outcome is the same: "Jules, a Métis sex object, is stated to act as a shaman but removes himself after he has mystically transformed Morag and then dies" (77). By suggesting that Pique may be destined for ethnic indeterminacy or forgetting, Goldie can relate this scene to the archetypal "vanishing Indian" image that he believes is pervasive in white-authored texts with Native themes. Given the general picture of Métis revival that Laurence has painted throughout her narrative, including the song Album at the end of the novel and Pique's determination to identify as Métis, such an interpretation seems obtuse at best. A more "realistic" interpretation might be that Laurence wants to show that the death of the Métis progenitor is *not* a sign of the demise of the Métis as a people, because the resilience that Jules has been able to build on and transmit to Pique is a sign of cultural strength. In this reading, his death means precisely the contrary of the "vanishing Indian" image, which portends inevitable physical and cultural extinction.

Similarly, a recent interpretation of Piquette's death scene by Laura Groening suggests that reading Native images in Canadian literature in terms of "the Manichean allegory and the specific trope of the dead and dying Indian" (21)[52] has acquired canonical status in literary criticism. My intention is not to single Groening out as a particularly egregious example of misinterpretation. On the contrary, I believe that her volume is an admirable example of the continuing work on Native-Canadian literature and images of Native Canadians in literature. In particular, her examination of the differences between women's and men's writing on Natives in early Canadian texts shows that renewed attention to those texts is able to reveal new insights rather than simply providing new fodder for the same old stereotypes. Yet Groening illustrates very concisely the sort of fallacious interpretation that results from reading Métis characters solely as Indian stereotypes.

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[52] Groening discusses the Manichean allegory in colonial contexts (as defined by Frantz Fanon and Abdul JanMohamed) as the ideology according to which the Native other is evil and the white colonizer is good (13-14).

In the introduction to her volume, Groening asserts the validity of a stereotype-based interpretation of Native representations and reaffirms Goldie's finding that even sympathetic authors are "trapped by [their] good intentions" (21). She gives the example of the harrowing scene in *The Diviners* in which Piquette Tonnerre and her two children are burned alive in their shack. As the bodies are brought out, the family patriarch, Lazarus, stands "alone, his face absolutely blank, portraying nothing" (159) and afterwards he is "standing alone there in the snow" (160). Groening asserts that "the image of Lazarus Tonnerre, alone in the snow, the father of dead children, replicates the most dangerous trope in Canadian literature: the Indian as the member of a dead and dying people – 'weird and waning,' as Duncan Campbell Scott (1905) put it in 'The Onondaga Madonna,' yet another sympathetic and well-meaning portrayal of Native people" (21).

This scene can be usefully compared to a similar scenario in another Canadian novel in which the death of a Métis character is followed by the reaction of the first-person narrator: "My tears were mixed with the rain, and they dropped down to where Cheryl was, in that murky water I had once loved to watch. Now I watched, hoping that Cheryl was somewhere down there, alive. But I knew there was no hope. Not for Cheryl. Not anymore" (Culleton 190). The second passage, which comes from Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five) contains many of the same elements as the passage from Laurençe: the tragic death of a young Métis woman, the destitute and helpless reaction of the family member as witness, and the sense of a much broader devastation beyond the personal grief. In both novels, these death scenes lie at the centre of narratives aimed at bringing Métis characters alive to Canadian readers as individuals who matter not merely to their own people but to all of us. Both are in aid of a larger message about the near-miraculous survival of the Métis in the face of overwhelming oppression.

Given the parallels, could we then state (for example) that '*the image of April Raintree, gazing at the murky water*, replicates the most dangerous trope in Canadian literature: the Indian as the member of a dead and dying people [...], yet another sympathetic and well-meaning portrayal of Native people'? Clearly, such a conclusion would offend the Métis author and all scholars of Native literature. Why, then, is it acceptable when applied to Laurence's scene? The only possible reason is that Laurence is a white author. I would suggest that once a pre-packaged reading of images of Natives is available and accepted as valid merely by identifying the ethnicity of the author of the image, then that interpretive approach has reached a point of bankruptcy: it serves no purpose except to foreclose further discussion of the scenes or images in question.

The Scorched-Wood People: History Restored

Interestingly enough, although Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977) culminates in perhaps the most renowned death in Canadian history – the hanging of Louis Riel – he has never been accused of resorting to the "vanishing Indian" theme in that text. That may be because Wiebe's portrait of Riel and the Métis makes it clear that they cannot be conflated with Indian people. It may also be that the overall message of the novel is one of vindication of the Métis struggle in the nineteenth century and of hope for a Métis renewal to come, ideas that are summed up in the last lines of the novel: "O God I pray again, let our people not be confounded. Give them that faith again" (351).

Building on the recognition of Métis endurance that Laurence made central to her last novel, Wiebe writes a historical novel that fills in the details of the struggle that constituted the legacy of the Métis represented by Jules Tonnerre. Laurence's narrative demonstrates that historical animosities need not be sustained indefinitely through the generations: the heirs of Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre, inhabiting the same place and sharing the same history (even though it be from different sides of the barricade) discover that there is more that brings them together than divides them, and that mutual respect (or even mutual love) is more satisfying than continued animosity and distrust.

In rewriting Métis history from a sympathetic point of view that vindicates the Métis struggles in 1869-70 and 1885 against Orange Ontario and John A. Macdonald (as the personification of Central Canadian dominance), rather than from the point of view of the "victorious" Anglo-Canadians (the perspective that, in racial terms, had vilified the Métis as people who were "natural" traitors because of their mixed race), Wiebe signals a shift in the Western Anglo-Canadian view of the Métis. His approach is based, first, on his willingness to take the arguments of the Métis, and of Riel in particular, seriously. In the past, the charge that Riel was insane – and worse, that his insanity took the form of a religious megalomania inspired by his Catholic beliefs – had always undermined pro-Métis views amongst the non-Catholic and non-Francophone majority. Thanks to the Anabaptist beliefs instilled during his Mennonite upbringing, Wiebe takes seriously the idea that a great leader could be a prophet and the representative of a higher truth than mere political expediency. According to this new representation, the historical Métis were not only a singular and autonomous "people," but they are also strongly representative of the aspirations of a Western Canada that is standing up to a distant and domineering Eastern Canada and a federal government controlled by Eastern views and interests (Braz 178-79).

By using a historical setting during the years of Métis greatness, with the creation of the province of Manitoba in 1870 and the heroic but doomed struggle ending in 1885, Wiebe both explains and avoids a direct examination of the subsequent years of Métis decline and marginalization. He had touched on these topics sympathetically in his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), which focuses on a Mennonite community in Western Canada. For someone who wants to write about "great people who think in great, large, and superhuman terms" (Mandel 154), a historical approach offers a solution to the problem of how to make a Métis theme central without being drawn into the intractable and (as Forer demonstrated) potentially sordid story of the Métis as an impoverished and marginalized group.

Wiebe portrays the Métis "from the inside" by using the Métis bard Pierre Falcon as the narrator, whose perspective is by turns personal and "ground-level" or omniscient and God-like, extending into "knowledge" about the ultimate fate of the Métis in the twentieth century, as for example where he states that "Eighty years later they would be known simply as 'the road allowance people'" (Wiebe 328). He also uses extensive quotations from Riel's writings and a wealth of historical detail. Much critical discussion has centred on the use of Falcon as both personal and omniscient narrator of the novel. As Barnaby Clunie notes, "The omniscience of Falcon allows Wiebe to avoid [using] dialect to mark linguistic boundaries between characters" (861). Apart from the occasional mention that some characters are speaking French, the narrative itself and the dialogue within it is presented straightforwardly in English. This approach is part of Wiebe's tactic of "normalizing" the Métis by downplaying differences from his Anglo-Canadian audience that would reinforce the very ideological and cultural distinctions that he wishes to break down.

Just as French and Michif are silently normalized through their unmarked presentation in English, so too is métissage made "normal" by being presented through the eyes of a Métis narrator. Falcon occasionally signals that he knows his audience has a different worldview (for example, where he addresses the reader regarding the willingness of the Métis to defer to Riel's faith, saying "You find that strange? No believer would" (256). Although his role is to explain the Métis' thinking and the background of the political crises in question, he rarely does so in terms of métissage as such. The racial status of the Métis arises only in the discourse of the invading soldiers from Ontario, whose references to Métis women as "a bit of the brown" and "wild meat" (119) are calculated to signal that racist attitudes toward the Métis are ideologically part and parcel of the military invasion from the east. As a natural part of the self-perception of the Métis characters, however, their métissage needs little "explanation."

Wiebe's muted treatment of racial métissage in the novel is no doubt a part of the effort to normalize the Métis in the eyes of his white readers by avoiding the trap of characterization based on race. As I discussed in Chapter Two, viewing Métis behaviour through the distorting lens of racial stereotypes had been used by Anglo-Canadians as a pretext to discount their claims. Wiebe does not sidestep the issue entirely, however. Indeed, he addresses it in the opening scene of the novel, where Riel is dressing for the momentous ceremony held to raise the Métis flag above Fort Garry, which they had taken from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) as the first step in asserting political control over Rupert's Land as it was being transferred to the Dominion of Canada. Riel's face, described "objectively" by the narrator, is "so stone white it betrayed nothing of his ancestry," but as he looks in the worn surface of the mirror, Riel sees his image "as though it were whorled, brown water" (10). The suggestion here is that self-perception of mixed-race identity is more important than any physical features marking it. As Wiebe explains in discussing this scene during an interview, "this is Riel with his split personality, in effect, facing this terrible world which at the moment he's got by the tail but which in the end is going to finish him off. It's already there in the very nature of the kind of person he is, by virtue of what he's seen in the mirror" (Neuman 241). For the novelist, his character's doubleness, which can be attributed to his mixed heritage as a Métis, serves not only mimetic but also metaphorical purposes.

At the level of Métis culture, however, Wiebe emphasizes images of unity-in-doubleness that contrast with this "split personality" at the individual level. In a short passage later in the novel, Wiebe touches on the question of cultural métissage and how it is perceived by the Métis. During a battle against the Sioux, recognizable as the battle of the Grand Coteau, Falcon describes the Métis men, desperate with thirst, praying for rain to their Catholic patron Saint Joseph, while their Cree companions pray to the Thunderbird. When their prayers are answered, "We caught the rain in hides, [...] not caring then whether the holy St. Joseph or the Thunderbird had heard our desperation" (112). This phrase suggests that the Métis benefit from an additive cultural métissage in which the strengths of both cultures are brought together unproblematically: the Métis do not feel compelled to choose between the two belief systems. This observation is confirmed by ethnographer Nathalie Kermoal, who has found that prior to the arrival of Catholic priests and nuns in the north-west, "les Métis avaient intégré à leur culture les enseignements spirituels de leurs ancêtres autochtones" (180). She argues that these teachings were retained through oral transmission, although the Métis' Catholic beliefs and practices were consolidated by the French-Canadian priests, who disapproved of heretical or "heathen" Indian beliefs (180-88).

Given the apparently easygoing attitude toward different religious beliefs, the terms in which Wiebe's narrator explains Métis hybridity as duality are rather more troubling than one might expect: "That's just how it is, a people with two heritages so rich that often one alone is more than you want, when you feel one of them move in you like a living beast and the other whispers, sings between your ears with a beauty you would gladly sell your soul to hear until you die. Such doubleness, such sometimes half-and-half richness of nothing" (112). The dizzying succession of terms evoking richness and cultural overload, doubleness and nothingness, leaves the reader with a decidedly ambivalent feeling about the experience and the value of cultural métissage. This description is quite at odds with the idea that the men do not care which heritage might have come to their rescue. Here, the image is one of the divided self, with one heritage controlling the body "like a living beast" and the other enticing the mind, siren-like.

The sort of split Wiebe is evoking here borders on the racist stereotypes according to which "primitive" people are dominated by instinct and physical urges and "civilized" people have a greater intellect and a capacity for reasoning that make them naturally superior to the former. Since he does not suggest which heritage represents the "physical" and which the "cerebral" side of the Métis, Wiebe may have felt that he has avoided that particular set of associations. Nevertheless, he does not avoid the image of the mixedblood person as beset with an internal struggle between two heritages that can never be entirely reconciled. The idea of the "sometimes half-and-half richness of nothing" cannot help but be perceived negatively (ending as it does with the resounding emptiness of "nothing"). Indeed, this negative portrayal of métissage reflects on the character of Riel, whose highly cerebral and spiritual perception of the world and his actions in it are interrupted by a recurring "strange outward stasis" (257) that might be seen as arising from a paralyzing "richness of nothing." Similarly, the contrasting portraits of Riel and Dumont parallel, at the level of the Métis body politic, the division that Wiebe imagines here: Riel is the "mind" drawn more to his European side and the Catholic religion, while Dumont is the down-to-earth, action-oriented "body."

This image of internal division and disharmony, whether in the Métis individual or the Métis collectivity, is one that bedevils many representations of the Métis, even those that, like Wiebe's, are aimed at emphasizing the unity of the Métis people. Historians make the point that "The product of the Aboriginal-European synthesis was more than the sum of its elements; it was an entirely distinct culture" ("Report of the Royal Commission" Vol. 4 part 2.1, par. 2). Nonetheless, the idea that *doubleness* is a fundamental element of Métis origins, experiences, and identities is logically unavoidable and, as we have seen even in an account as positive as Wiebe's, that doubleness is inevitably seen as a deficit compared to the presumed singleness of a "pure" ethnic identity. The notion of ethnic purity is, of course, imaginary but potent: anthropologists such as Amselle and Gruzinski have shown, and it is now generally accepted, that pure ethnicity simply does not exist in the real world of human societies. Yet the imaginary world constructed out of the human desire for belonging and identity is based on a constant erasure of certain differences and insistence on others. There is an unavoidable irony in the desire of the Métis themselves to assert a unified identity that is nonetheless always said to be based on a double racial ancestry and cultural heritage. Even after delving in detail into the distinct culture maintained and nourished by Métis women, for example, Kermoal concludes that the richness of Métis culture stems from the fact that "les femmes ont toujours su combiner leur passé maternel amérindien et leur passé paternel francophone, conférant à la société métisse cette spécificité qui la distingue des sociétés autochtones et de la société canadienne" (249). The fact that Métis culture and identity is always defined in terms of a singularity derived from maintaining a twofold difference – that is, liminality as the grounds for identity – goes a long way toward explaining why métissage, a phenomenon that is becoming more common every day, always remains a puzzle.

The *strategic* use of (perceived or assumed) Métis doubleness, either by non-Métis people or by Métis people themselves, makes it difficult for an observer to grasp how the Métis position themselves relative to their ancestral groups. When Father André, an Oblate priest who had previously supported the Métis, criticizes Riel for threatening the country with "Indian war," Riel reminds him that "Gabriel and I are also Indian" and says that "the people of my blood have called me" (Wiebe, *Scorched-Wood* 203). In the conclusion of the novel, Dumont tells Leif Crozier, the North West Mounted Police commander who was defeated by Dumont and the Métis at Duck Lake (the first military action of the 1885 resistance) that Crozier cannot understand the Métis because he "think[s] like a white" and that "There's no white country can hold a man with a vision like Riel, with people like us who would understand it and believe it" (351). Here, Dumont is emphasizing the difference between Métis and whites and asserting that the former will have a longevity far beyond the simplistic "white" notion that they "really are finished" (351) after Riel's execution.

A different view of "Indians" is conveyed when the Métis go to battle against the Sioux (112), or in the epigraph to the second chapter, which is taken word for word from a petition sent to the federal government in 1882 by the Saskatchewan Métis, led by Dumont: "Having so long held this country as its masters and so often defended it against the Indians at the price of our blood, we consider it not asking too much to request that the Government allow us to occupy our lands in peace" (121).[53] These two contradictory suggestions – that the Métis are allied with the Indians or opposed to them – are predicated on the different attitudes of the Métis speaker toward his interlocutor. When he wishes to emphasize his loyalty and serviceability to the interests of the central government, he can emphasize his difference from "the Indians," but when he wishes to emphasize the difference between himself and his white opponent, he invokes his Indian blood as the guarantor of a fundamental distinction. This ability on the part of the Métis to take up different postures for strategic purposes is fraught with risk when it can be turned around and manifested as doubts about where the "loyalties" of the Métis lie in a cultural or social context where they are not the dominant presence. It is precisely this situation that Primeau depicted as placing the Métis at a disadvantage within a Francophone community that took Métis allegiances for granted.

Although *The Scorched-Wood People* may have succeeded in "immers[ing] [its audience] imaginatively in the Métis' world" (van Toorn 143-44) to give them an "empathetic understanding of their grievances" (143), we should recognize that the "world" in question is heavily circumscribed both by Wiebe's religious convictions and by the archival and historical sources on which he relies to create his historical fiction (Braz 174-80). As a result, the picture of the Métis "people" that emerges from this text is highly Christian and homocentric. All of the main actors on both the Métis and the Canadian sides are men; the female characters who appear do so in short scenes that are geared toward further illuminating aspects of the male characters or their actions.

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[53] "Ayant été regardés pendant si longtemps comme les maîtres de ce pays, l'ayant défendu contre les sauvages au prix de notre sang, nous considérons que nous ne demandons pas trop, en priant le Gouvernement de nous permettre d'occuper en paix nos terres" (qtd. in Trémaudan 283).

When asked about the "aggressively male world" he often writes about, Wiebe replies that "The story of Riel just did not allow me to get [a major] woman character in it" (Neuman 242).[54] Before 1980, official fur trade history, which encompassed the history of the Métis, was a history of men: both the European men who travelled to and lived in Rupert's Land to trade and the Indian men who were their trading partners. It was assumed that all of the activities involved in the trade were done by men, from the directors of the Hudson's Bay Company in London down to the lowliest voyageur paddling thousands of miles between trading posts scattered across the landscape. It was not until the publication in 1980 of two history books – Sylvia Van Kirk's *"Many Tender Ties"* and Jennifer Brown's *Strangers in Blood* – that the significance of women in the fur trade and the existence of a fur-trade *society* (founded in the first instance on interracial relationships and then developed by subsequent generations of Métis people) were recognized by historians.

The focus in the story of the nineteenth-century Métis uprisings is on men's politics and men's fights, all of which take place within the purview of the exclusively male institutions of government (including the Métis provisional government set up in 1869), the Catholic Church, and the armies of both sides. Even in the central part of the novel where Riel is married, living in exile and working as a schoolteacher, there is only one significant domestic scene. This scene, in which Riel and his wife make love, seems to be aimed at filling out the portrait of the man as a flesh-and-blood individual in addition to being a spiritual leader and prophet of his people (175-78).

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[54] This is an ironic observation to make, given Siggins's observation that Riel was a "mamma's boy" (32), and that one of the most important relationships in Riel's life was with his sister Sara.

In contrast, the quintessential Métis activity of buffalo hunting, which, as historians have demonstrated, was very much a community activity in which women played an equally important part (Ferland 127-29; Barkwell 214), is depicted here as an exclusively masculine activity when the narrator explains that "For the three generations of our Métis nation, riding to buffalo was a man's occupation" (Wiebe, *Scorched-Wood* 143). A description of Dumont dancing after the capture of Fort Garry, which is referred to by R.P. Bilan as conveying the "spirit of the Métis people" (Bilan and Solecki 173), is supremely male: "Gabriel as dancing. On the hides, all alone, the fiddlers playing the power he churned in all of us, a magnificent male dance that frothed with Métis fighting spirit, wild and living and shaped in our people by our strong horses and the wide, wide earth we rode" (Wiebe, *Scorched-Wood* 42). This scene combines many aspects of Métis culture – music and dance, horses and the land – into an ultra-masculine whole. The power and autonomy of the Métis people are demonstrated through an emphasis on virile attributes.

Riel's decision to stage a battle right in the settlement of Batoche is questioned by Dumont's wife Madeleine. His answer is that "it will not be men alone fighting far away.

We are a community together [...] and these children and you women will give the men strength, you will fight too because faith alone will give us the victory" (264). This sentiment partially echoes Riel's poem "La Métisse," which suggests that Métis women are the justification for their men's battles. They are the ones who can receive and acknowledge the outcome of men's actions, but men's actions themselves – their battles, meetings and manoeuvrings – are what really change the world. In this view, the role of women is to passively accept the world made by men and to continue to reproduce the nation, or "the people" which revolves around and depends on them. Wiebe goes further to suggest that only the community as a whole can be victorious through "faith" rather than violent battles. Yet this fleeting suggestion is lost in the second half of the novel, which is dominated by arguments about military tactics and the details of skirmishes and battles.

Just as was the case in the nineteenth century in the Falcon and Riel texts discussed in Chapter One, the focus on masculinity translates into a focus on European ancestry, given the gender divide within the process of métissage. Since it is (at least symbolically if not always biologically) the maternal side of the Métis that ties them to their Indian ancestry, this male-centred view of the Métis automatically entails some erasure of that ancestry. As I discuss in Chapter Four, the entry of strong female Métis voices onto the literary scene beginning in the 1970s began to reverse that picture by emphasizing the Indian heritage of the Métis and downplaying their European heritage.

The "Them" and "Us" Conundrum

Primeau, Laurence, and Wiebe represent a new generation of Western novelists who recognize the significance of the Métis to their history and current reality. Above all, they wish, in Laurence's words, to "reach a point when it is no longer necessary to say Them and Us" (*Heart* 166). George Woodcock says that Laurence begins to achieve this reversal in *The Diviners*, where "the Métis are no longer the Other" (105), but that an important part of her use of Métis characters is that "she is always observing them from within, in their own rights, for their own sakes" (109) rather than purely as a vehicle for working out some aspect of life quite separate from Métis existence.

Like Primeau, Laurence is interested in demonstrating the attitudes and conditions that have made Métis marginality an apparently inescapable fact of Western life. Both authors demonstrate – one in a Francophone community and one in an Anglophone community – how social stigma works, how Métis characters attempt to overcome it, and how white characters become aware of it as an insidious force in the lives of Métis people and, consequently, of white Canadians as well. Unlike Primeau, and in defiance of the idea of racial separation that Connor tried to assert as the natural ideal for Canadian society, Laurence depicts an interracial relationship between a Métis man and a white woman that, as Earl Fitz points out, "symbolizes a more racially tolerant future," not least because "the interracial sex in *The Diviners* is based on love, not [...] on rape, violence, and debasement." (78). As the product of that liaison, Pique "proves that a miscegenous sexual liaison can produce a strong, free, and beautiful human being, one consciously proud of having a racially mixed heritage" (81). The narrative in *The Diviners* spans the same time period as *Dans le muskeg*, but by portraying the central relationship as a successful interracial one, which contrasts with the narrative of *Dans le muskeg*, in which a similar relationship is frustrated, *The Diviners* ends on a strong note of Métis renewal rather than of socio-cultural stasis.

Fundamental to renewal for the Métis community is the moral determination to rebuild a debilitated ethnic community. In that sense, too, Laurence's text points to oral heritage as a powerful source of ethnic strength. As Pamela McCallum notes, "In [Christie's] tales, Morag learns that oppression and the courage to struggle against it are not isolated individual responses but continuous throughout time" (9), a lesson that applies to the Métis as well as the Scottish Highlanders. The pessimistic message in Forer's novel is, on the contrary, that oppression may be continuous throughout time, but that a community *can* lose its ability to struggle against it when pride in its heritage and hope for the future have become too attenuated to counteract the negative impact of colonial structures and attitudes. Once those structures and attitudes have become part of the fabric of the Métis community itself, its resilience is compromised apparently beyond recovery.

Intervening to re-establish for English-speaking readers the "lost" history of Métis greatness, Wiebe's text shows a desire on the part of an English-Canadian writer to establish within mainstream Canadian culture the positive view of Riel and the nineteenth-century Métis that was already common within the French-Canadian and Franco-Métis communities in Western Canada (although even in sympathetic French-Canadian novels, the Métis are nevertheless marginalized). By taking a historical approach, Wiebe avoids dealing directly with the subject of how to overcome the oppression of the Métis. His story is directed at criticizing the political and economic manipulations that led to the debilitated state of a Métis people who had dominated the North-West. His omniscient narrator is able to foresee the terrible condition they would be reduced to decades later. What is more, he suggests that Riel, with his prophetic powers, was also aware of it: "In his stifling summer cell Riel saw this coming horror; cried and prayed long against it" (328). The final message of the novel, however, is that the Métis are far from "finished" (351), and that once white Canada realizes that Riel was not mad (thanks, perhaps, to revisionist writings such as Wiebe's), his vision of greatness for the Métis will once again take hold.

As the other authors discussed in this chapter demonstrate, however, mere visions of greatness are not in themselves enough to reverse a century of neglect and, worse, active oppression. At an even more fundamental level, the portrait of the historical Métis people that Wiebe creates is actually very distant from the self-perception of their descendants. Narratives such as those of Laurence and Wiebe show mainstream white society's desire to embrace the Métis, an ethos that can be viewed within the context of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission whose work throughout the 1960s culminated in the *Bilingualism Act* of 1969 and the official Multiculturalism Policy introduced in 1971 (Fleras and Elliott 301-03). But as we will see in the next chapter, partially as a result of the "Red Power" movement and partially as a consequence of the growing strength of political activism within the Métis community, the discourse in the Métis community, while it was also interested in gaining recognition of Métis ethnicity (or more importantly for political purposes, the recognition of the Métis as aboriginal), was insistent on Métis indigeneity, giving them a status quite different from other ethnicities in Canada. Maria Campbell's 1973 autobiography, *Halfbreed*, reflects the significant changes being wrought in Métis identity – an identity that favours the Indian side of Métis heritage much more strongly and single-mindedly than in Riel's time.

Because the presence of the two original ancestries are a *sine qua non* of métissage, much of the history of the Métis people and representations of the Métis in Canadian literature has therefore been about how the Métis or mixedblood person is positioned in relation to Indians and whites. At a more general level, Canadian authors have used Métis themes to examine the intricacies of relations between different ethnic groups within the space of the Canadian nation-state. The very malleability and diversity of Métis positions makes this theme particularly useful in exploring the complexities of intercultural relations. As Métis ethnohistorian Heather Devine has recently demonstrated in vivid detail, the idea of "Métis" covers a whole range of identity positions across the spectrum of racial and cultural mixing between "Indian" and "European." The historical Métis had the freedom to choose the position they wished to occupy according to their current needs. Devine describes this process in the utilitarian terms of the fur trade:

> [Métis] Freemen bands functioned best when they could maintain familial relations with adjacent Indian bands and with personnel at Euro-Canadian trading companies *simultaneously* [...].
>
> Should real or fictive kin relations not enable freemen to achieve the economic goals of themselves or their relatives, their strategies would

> be adjusted accordingly. In choosing alternative methods, they selected from either the aboriginal or Euro-Canadian cultural repertoire, as individual inclination, talent, or immediate circumstances dictated. (*People* 108)

In the years between 1885 and 1960, the Métis were under constant pressure from a dominant Euro-Canadian society to take up a rigid position on that continuum, but that society also insisted on attaching a class status to the racial status of the Métis. Today, Métis writers are re-asserting their right to establish how they wish to position themselves. As I show in the next chapter, that position is substantially different from Riel's, even though that leader remains a symbolic touchstone of Métis strength.

So just at the moment when English-Canadian writers in particular begin to embrace the Métis as privileged representatives of Canadian multiculturalism, the Métis themselves begin to take charge of how they wish to represent themselves, and in the process reject that embrace.[55] Although LaRocque acknowledges that Laurence creates Métis characters who are "plausible and human," she finds no "authenticity" in her texts that can compare to Campbell's *Halfbreed*, where the Metis experience is not used "as a vehicle for a worldview, a doctrine or even as a social protest" but is merely a reflection of the Métis "spirit and ethos" ("Metis" 91). Campbell's construction of Métis identity, which answers and contrasts with these white-authored accounts of the meaning of métissage, is the subject of the next chapter. By insisting that true Métis identity lies closer to the "Indian" end of the racio-cultural spectrum, Campbell emphasizes that the difference between "Them" and "Us" cannot easily be erased simply because mainstream white authors would have it so.

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[55] As a corrective to the idea that declaring Canada "multicultural" suddenly opened the country's eyes (and hearts) to an previously unrecognized reality, see J.A. Wainwright's excellent overview of the general level of ignorance that reigned in mainstream (white) Canada in the 1960s and '70s about ethnic groups, Natives, black Canadians, and women in general, and the education and literature that fed that ignorance.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTRUCTING THE NEW MÉTIS IDENTITY IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The treatment of the Métis in Canadian literature changed forever in 1973 with the publication of Maria Campbell's autobiography, *Halfbreed*. No longer would the norm be representation "from the outside" by non-Métis authors: the success of Campbell's book has demonstrated that readers are equally interested in representation "from the inside" by Métis authors. At the same time, Campbell's feminist viewpoint changed the inflection of Métis narratives. Stories of Métis lives had been published over the years in both English and French, all of them written or told by men and depicting the colourful past of life and adventures in the fur trade, buffalo hunts, and the resistance movements of the nineteenth century.[56] For the first time, Campbell's account dealt with contemporary life – from the 1940s to the 1960s – from a woman's point of view. She showed that it was possible to lament the painful aspects of Métis experience but also to celebrate the positive aspects, making Métis ethnicity a matter of pride rather than shame.

Hailed as the text that "initiated the process of representing Indigenous women both positively and knowledgeably" (Acoose, "Post" 29), *Halfbreed* was the first narrative by a Métis woman to lay out in agonizing detail the accumulation of small acts by white neighbours, government officials, and an inexorable socioeconomic system that relegated the Métis to lives of inescapable poverty and pervasive everyday racism. Margaret Laurence had managed to capture some of this reality in *The Diviners* by showing how racism against the Métis takes the form of "an overall neglect, a crowding out of an unwanted people whose lifestyle was a nuisance," so that the Métis have "no place of belonging" (Craig 116). But with *Halfbreed*, Campbell implicitly tells white authors what Pique, the Métis daughter, says to her white mother: "I don't guess you would know how it feels" (Laurence, *Diviners* 350). In setting about to tell others "what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in this country" (8), Campbell became one of the key initiators of contemporary Native literature in Canada.[57]

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[56] These include accounts by Gabriel Dumont, Erasmus, Goulet (see Charrette), Vermette, Welsh (see Weekes). On the sparsity of Métis women's historical accounts, see Payment's article "'*La vie en rose*'?: Métis Women at Batoche, 1870 to 1920."

Campbell's description of her childhood, with the colourful cast of family and community members and vivid details about daily life and interaction with Indian relations has generally been accepted as an unvarnished and truthful picture of the contents of Métis ethnicity. In this chapter I revisit Campbell's text to argue that the presumption that hers is a perfectly transparent account of Métis ethnicity and identity is problematic: such a characterization fails to take into account the enormous work that Campbell puts into *shaping* the Métis identity she wishes to project onto her people. Certainly, the nineteenth-century Métis identity had changed in the years between 1885 and 1973 but there was no continuous tradition of self-representation. Campbell's account is a rebuilding or reconstruction that reinterprets Métis identity in light of the devastating experiences of the twentieth century, turning the politicized view of the 1970s into a sort of eternal truth about the nature of the Métis in Canada. Her reconstruction of identity reflects ambivalence about some of the contents of historical Métis identities, particularly identities on the more Europeanized end of the spectrum, an ambivalence that I examine here in order to illuminate what it tells us about some of the silences and tensions that remain hidden in the literary treatment of this conflicted and contradictory subject.

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[57] The phrase "Native literature" has become one of the standard ways in which to refer to all writing by First Nations and Métis authors, initiated most prominently by Petrone with *Native Literature in Canada* (1990). The anthology *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada* (1993) contains texts by several Métis writers. More recently, the term "Aboriginal" has also been used as an equivalent of "Native," for example in McKegney's *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School* and Lischke and McNab's *Walking the Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*. McKegney's volume does not contain any Métis writing (given the focus on residential school experiences), while the anthology by Lischke and McNab contains only one piece by a Métis author: historian Olive Dickason. Indeed, a general distinction can be discerned between treatments of Aboriginal themes in Eastern Canada, which tend to focus more exclusively on First Nations writing, and in Western Canada, where Métis voices are usually an important component. (See Lawrence 213-17 for a fascinating discussion of self-perception of Métisness by Métis people living in Toronto.) The problem of Métis self-representation that I am discussing here is in part attributable to the conflation of discussions of Métis and First Nations cultures, histories, and identities that obscure the particular background of the Métis. When speaking about Métis individuals or ethnicity, I distinguish between "Indian" people who trace their ancestry back to pre-contact groups (or "First Nations"), and Métis people who trace their origins to fur trade métissage. Outside of Western Canada, there appears to be an attenuated level of awareness of Métis difference, which results in the sort of conflation I am attempting to counteract through this study.

In Campbell's account of her own life and that of her Cheechum (her paternal great-grandmother, who acts as the moral and cultural centre of the autobiography), she values and emphasizes certain Indian aspects of Métis identity and rejects or paints in a negative light some elements of Métis life that were passed down by European (or Euro-Canadian) ancestors and contributed to the sense of Métis difference – not only from whites but also from Indians – in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Campbell's purpose is understandable: she wants her narrative to help spark a sense of urgent political purpose amongst her people, to push for solidarity among all Native people to maximize their political power, and to ensure that Canadians are receptive to the political claims being put forward by Indian and Métis groups. Nevertheless, as I examine in detail in this chapter, a number of internal contradictions in *Halfbreed* point to a deep-seated discomfort with the history and meaning of métissage in Canada.

Part of the reaction to English-Canada's rejection and oppression of the Métis after 1885 was for some Métis to identify as French-Canadians or English-Canadians, "forgetting" their ancestry in order to assimilate and thus avoid being relegated to a Native underclass (Lussier, *Contemporary* 12-13). That story is the obverse side of Campbell's: who would not want to avoid, if they could, the life of desperate struggle and hopelessness that she depicts? Yet such stories of apparently successful assimilation are now being uncovered and reassessed as subsequent generations reverse the process of assimilation and lay claim to their lost Native heritage. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss *Women in the Shadows* (1991), a film by Christine Welsh about her "ethnic rediscovery." Produced two decades after *Halfbreed* appeared, Welsh's film is a measure of the vast change in Canadian society, where identifying as Métis no longer means relegating oneself to racist opprobrium, but instead can be experienced as the recovery of a fascinating and valued past. That fact itself shows how profoundly Canadian society and attitudes toward the Métis have changed since Campbell first wrote, and in large measure *because* she wrote.

Bolstered by the impetus of second-wave feminism and the growth of women's studies, the female-centred reconsideration of ethnic belonging that appears in Campbell's text and Welsh's film overturns the male-centred version of Métis identity that dominated until the early 1980s. The restitution of female power within First Nations communities has been seen as a correction to a false picture of Native women created by

European patriarchal domination (Armstrong, "Invocation" ix-x). Much of *Halfbreed* is geared toward conveying the message that Métis women are the strongest part of the community and that the men have betrayed them by succumbing to alcohol abuse and resorting to domestic violence as an outlet for their frustration.

There is no denying that the patriarchal colour of official history left women, Native women in particular, largely out of the picture in Canada's colonial history. Nevertheless, I will argue that the tendency to erase distinctions between Métis and Indian culture and to conflate the historical experiences of those groups has significant implications for how we understand the meaning of métissage in Canadian history and contemporary life. One of the consequences of Campbell's resignifying of métissage has been to endorse its reinterpretation as a phenomenon that derives solely from colonial violence rather than from mutually beneficial interaction. The middle ground is being forgotten as métissage continues to be portrayed in negative, indeed catastrophic, terms in texts by Métis and other Native authors, a development that I take up in detail in Chapter Five. Campbell is now held up as a foundational figure of contemporary Native literature, exemplified by Delaware poet and playwright Daniel David Moses's epithet for her: "The Mother of Us All" (Keeshig-Tobias in Lutz 216). In that sense, Campbell's configuration of contemporary Métisness is fundamental to understanding the paths that subsequent writers have followed in their representations of the Métis.

The story of the renewal of Métis identity after decades of relative invisibility is fraught with tension about the morality of métissage and how to understand the contact that gave rise to it. One of the main changes that have affected the Métis self-image over the past century, for example, is the switch away from Christianity and, in many cases, toward Native spirituality. A cultural change that in other circumstances would be considered part of a natural and unavoidable process of transculturation in a context of cultural contact takes on a more agonized political and personal significance because of its imbrication in the history of the colonial domination of Native peoples in Canada.

The most important distinction to be made here is between voluntary cultural change from within and change that is forced onto a group as a result of government policies or racist social pressures. Canada's official multiculturalism and the granting of minority rights depend on the recognition of ethnic differences, but the fact that Métis ethnicity arose from colonial contact entails particular complications. Christine Sypnowich cautions, for example, that "if differences are born out of oppression, then it is not clear how liberating the recognition of them can be" (125). Since the Métis moved, broadly speaking, from a context of non-oppression prior to 1870-1885 to a context of oppression after those dates, the question is whether cultural features such as language and religion that developed prior to 1870 are to be considered consequences of oppression (particularly considering that part of the subsequent oppression involved, for example, the suppression of the French language for all Western Francophones, including French-speaking Métis). That is, as I explore further in Chapter Five, a certain contest is under way in Aboriginal intellectual circles about how far back to extend the notion of contact as violence. The construction of Métis ethnicity today is based on implicit judgments about the status of its historical development. It would seem unfair to characterize them retroactively as suffering from an infiltrated consciousness that prevented them from seeing their true Métis nature – particularly when those very features were an important part of Métis self-affirmation in the nineteenth century – and yet that is precisely the implication of some of the ways in which the contact era is being represented in literature.

Because it takes place in textual form rather than in a distant past lost to direct knowledge, the work that Campbell does with selective remembering and forgetting in order to shape a collective identity she can live with provides a fascinating case of how an imagined community that had almost forgotten how to imagine itself can be brought back to life thanks to some crucial ideological operations. This process is not without its ironies, because the desire to hearken back to the "golden age" of the Métis prior to 1885 as an anchor for today's Métis identity is carefully calculated to obscure or resignify aspects of Métis identity – including some major aspects such as Catholicism – that nineteenth-century Métis experienced as fundamental to their identity and as one of the cultural attributes that most fully distinguished them from Indians. As I discuss below and in the next chapter, the reconfiguration of identity through selective remembering and forgetting, while it is aimed at reviving and empowering parts of today's Métis community, also has the perverse effect of devaluing the originary métissage that gave rise to the Métis people in the first place.

Halfbreed: Resignifying Métissage

Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973) illustrates some of the paradoxes and ironies inherent in claiming a "Halfbreed" identity that is both aboriginal and yet distinct from other types of aboriginality. It also shows that the way in which Métis history is traced, reassessed, and reshaped in literature has everything to do with how the métissage that gave rise to the Métis people is represented today. In Campbell's account, the story of the Métis in Saskatchewan begins in the 1860s, during a short idyllic time "in a land free of towns, barbed-wire fences and farm-houses" (9), where the Métis settle and govern themselves by adapting the rules of the buffalo hunt. This period of peace and autonomy is shattered by white settlers who arrive from Ontario, trampling on Métis rights and stealing their land while Ottawa chooses to ignore the Métis altogether. The history of the ill treatment of the Métis by Anglo settlers from eastern Canada, a history that has lasted ever since, has led to one of the most vexing problems imaginable: how do you continue to value mixed ancestry when one side of that ancestry has become the enemy?

Campbell's narrative procedure is remarkable in that she manages to fashion what has been accepted as an authoritative story of ethnic identity based on a series of contradictions. Campbell paints a thoroughly dispiriting picture of people overwhelmed by defeatism and helplessness as a result of government oppression or neglect and relentless racism, but simultaneously asserts that the defining feature of the Métis is their defiance and endurance in the face of adversity. She makes a point of emphasizing the differences between the Métis and Indians, yet her figure of the exemplary Métis – her Cheechum – is a woman who rejects many of the values and attitudes that characterized the Métis of the nineteenth century. This strategy is designed to enable Campbell's attempts, through her narrative, to salvage hope from hopelessness for her people by offering her own individual story of escaping a life of prostitution and drug addiction as a model by which we can understand the true Métis nature.

Campbell takes up a position as representative of her group by addressing her readers at the outset to inform them that she is writing "to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" (8). The contrasting positions assigned to the reader within that phrase are the first signal of the sort of mental push-and-pull that Campbell will exert, as we are interpellated first as a "you" located outside the world of Halfbreed women and therefore lacking in knowledge about their lives, and then as part of a "we" inhabiting "our" country, grouped together with the narrator within a shared national space and therefore, presumably, sharing an interest in one another and moral obligations toward one another. This movement might be seen as a mirror image of the simultaneous forces of "incorporation and distancing" (Stoler 83) that colonial regimes exert on mixedblood people: Campbell draws non-Natives closer but at the same time keeps them (us) at a distance.

The two elements – racial and gendered – in the phrase "Halfbreed woman" are equally significant to Campbell's approach to constructing a new Métis identity. Not only does she describe her community from a gendered position that had never been represented before, but also her construction of Métis identity is influenced in crucial ways by her experiences as a girl and a woman and by her emphasis on female ancestors as the true foundation and backbone of the community, displacing such historical heroes as Riel, Dumont, and Falcon from the male-centred representations of her people that we saw in Chapter One and in *The Scorched-Wood People*.

To reconfigure contemporary Métis identity, Campbell raises the issue of different phenotypical features (i.e., physical markers of racial descent), only to discount them as signs of real difference between Métis and Indians. Instead, she emphasizes character traits as the most important distinguishing features: the Métis are more independent and less deferential toward (white) authority than are Indians. Finally, Campbell uses the figure of her Cheechum to fashion a Métis identity that combines the notion of defiance *and* Indianness to represent the ideal Métis.

Because they are seen as unfailing indicators of a person's race, physical features are often part of the representations of métissage. Where an individual's features clash with the accepted phenotypical norms of a surrounding group, those features become a marker of difference. This difference results in teasing, explains Campbell: "Blue eyes were unusual where I came from and we were teased by our brown- and black-eyed relatives" (41). The difference is important for more than its mere difference from the norm, however. Campbell points out, in her offhand way, that people (including her Indian relations) make sets of assumptions about physical features, ethnoracial heritage, and human character, so that she grew up believing "that any Indian unfortunate enough to have blue eyes must have the devil Scot in him or her" (41). The adult Campbell narrating the story can undermine that stereotype based on her subsequent meeting with a "short and meek-looking" brown-eyed Scot. By the same token, she tells about the teasing as she is describing a visit to a band of treaty Indians, some of whom also have blue eyes. Cheechum tells Campbell that "despite the fact that they were treaty Indians, they were more Halfbreed than we were" (41). This contradiction results in a decoupling of physical features and aboriginality: the Montreal Lake treaty Indians in question live the most traditional lifestyle described in the book, demonstrating that mixed blood need not be inevitably linked with Europeanization. This example supports the argument that ethnic identity is a matter of cultural inheritance and self-determination rather than an essence passed down by blood.

The question of eye colour does not tell the full story of how Campbell treats phenotypical features, however. On the subject of hair, Campbell reaches a different conclusion. She tells us that when she started school she had waist-length, curly hair, which her mother "combed [...] and wrapped [...] around her fingers to make long, fat ringlets that fell down around my shoulders" (48), attempting to turn Campbell into a feminine girl. Her Cheechum has different plans, and spends hours rubbing bear grease into Campbell's hair and braiding it, ostensibly to give her "a shiny, tidy look" (49). Yet Cheechum's deeper motive, expressed in her determined statement that "your Cheechum will make your hair straight yet" (49), seems to be to change what features of Campbell's she *can* change to make them more Indian. The adult Campbell endorses this attempt, noting that "today, at thirty-three, my hair is straight as a poker" (49). The small victory of Indian grooming over recalcitrant non-Indian hair is just one of a series of victories for Cheechum that add up to a successful reshaping of her great-granddaughter in a more indigenous mould. That Campbell should announce this success overturns the contrary lesson of eye colour, where we are told that physical features are not indicative in themselves of degrees of indigeneity. Perhaps because eye colour cannot be changed, it must be defused by being shown to be arbitrary and devoid of meaning. Hair quality, which can be altered, can on the contrary be used as a meaningful symbol of the indigenization of the Métis girl.

Much more central to how Campbell constructs Métis identity is a moral quality rather than a physical feature: defiance. Beginning with Campbell's restatement of Métis history in her first chapter, defiance is presented as a Métis characteristic that existed before 1885 and that has been maintained despite a repressive socioeconomic and political environment. It is represented most strongly by Cheechum, who "never surrendered at Batoche: she only accepted what she considered a dishonourable truce" (156). Campbell describes the differences between the Métis and Indians in ways that make a link between the unruliness of the Métis and their resistance to conforming to colonial structures and expectations. She describes Métis women as generally "outgoing and noisy," a tendency that she generalizes to the Métis as a whole when she contrasts them with the Indians on nearby reserves: "There was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds. They were completely different from us – quiet when we were noisy, dignified even at dances and get-togethers. Indians were very passive – they would get angry at things done to them but would never fight back, whereas Halfbreeds were quick-tempered – quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget" (26). In this way, Campbell repeatedly draws a parallel between Métis ethnic difference and Métis political engagement.

In contrast to the generally accepted assumption that colonization has affected Indians and Métis in the same ways and to the same degree, Campbell suggests that her own people are more independent than Indians because they have not been coerced or compromised through their relations with whites. "Unlike their Indian brothers," she writes, "[the Métis men] were not prepared to settle down to an existence of continual hardship, scratching out a scanty living from the land. They were drawn to this part of Saskatchewan because the region was good for hunting and trapping, and there were no settlers" (12). The attachment of Indians to their land is characterized here as a form of bondage which the Métis have escaped. The treaty Indians who have "settled down" on their reserves are associated discursively with the "settlers" whom the Métis have avoided by retreating to the north. This argument subtly contradicts the view that their status as landless "Road Allowance people" has cut the Métis off from the all-important connection to the land that is understood as the most fundamental part of indigeneity. In this passage, Campbell turns the Métis' general lack of an official land base into a sort of virtuous landlessness that enables them to live freely from hunting and trapping and thus to maintain a truer link to the land than reserve-bound Indians.

This subtle undermining of reserve Indians compensates, in rhetorical form, for the ridicule that Campbell's people suffered when their Indian relations "laughed at us and scorned us" because "[t]hey had land and security, [the Métis] had nothing" (26). The contrast in political interests and approaches between the two groups reaches its culmination when Campbell describes her ultimate involvement in Native politics. Once again, the more passive and self-interested position of the treaty Indians leads them to reject a proposal for a national federation that would press their cause with a single Native voice: "They felt that the militant stand that would be taken by such an organization would jeopardize their Treaty rights. 'The Halfbreeds,' they said, 'have nothing to lose, so they can afford to be militant'" (155). While Campbell's ultimate position is to call for Native solidarity, her presentation of the actual background of the political organization she has been involved in emphasizes that, far from being the impoverished adjuncts of "true" Native militancy, the Métis have been at the forefront of Native political organization, thus reactualizing the situation that existed in the nineteenth century.

The image of the more acquiescent Indian is reinforced by Campbell's description of her maternal great-uncle, a Cree band leader, who is passive and silent at council meetings with the (white) Indian agent. The girl asks, "You're the chief. How come you don't talk?" (27), but does not record any response from her uncle. The response comes from his wife, who says, "It's the white in [Campbell]" that prompts her to express her opinion so openly (and thereby to question the system and the relationship between her uncle and the agent). Again, Campbell uses this example to make the point that "Treaty Indian women don't express their opinions. Halfbreed women do" (27). This is the only place in the text where Campbell directly broaches the idea that part of what makes the Métis different might be "the white" in them. Granted, the idea is expressed by a Cree woman who disapproves of Campbell's outspokenness and is looking for an explanation that will excuse the cultural inappropriateness of the girl's speech. Yet Campbell's generalization turns the negative intent into a positive meaning, making it consistent with the valorization of Métis assertiveness throughout her autobiography.

An indication of the political sensitivity of drawing distinctions between Métis and Indians is indicated by the fact that one of the few negative criticisms of the text by a Native critic points to these details. Janice Acoose states that these comparisons "reflec[t] the author's subtle conformity to the White-Euro-Canadian-Christian patriarchy when she begins to fragment Indigenous people" ("Post" 145). Whereas Acoose confirms that the rest of Campbell's text constitutes "an act of resistance" (147) in which she searches for "her authentic self" (139), this one aspect alone is singled out as amounting to "broad generalizations that are more stereotypical than factual" (145). Campbell clearly intends to make a connection between the more outgoing, aggressive character of the Métis and their political activism, based on her own life experience. This divide between Métis and other Natives lies behind her final call for solidarity between the groups, when she foresees that "one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together as one. Maybe not because we love one another, but because we will need each other to survive" (156-57). Clearly, the Native solidarity Campbell hoped for did develop. Yet Acoose's negative comment is noteworthy, especially given the tendency amongst Native writers not to criticize the work of their peers (LaRocque, "Native Writers" 253), because of its message that in order to fit into the world of Native literature, or to demonstrate pan-Indian solidarity, Métis writers should avoid such Métis/Indian contrasts and treat Métis ethnic difference, if at all, in innocuous terms. This reaction may explain why Native discussions of *Halfbreed* often avoid the question of Métis/Indian difference in order to emphasize a shared history as victims of colonization and racism.

Campbell's descriptions of strong women are not themselves a problem for critics like Acoose: what seems to be required is that they should be presented in such a way as to represent Native women in general (including "treaty Indian women") rather than Métis women alone. Ignoring the distinctions that Campbell makes between these groups is necessary if her text is to serve as a model that "resists the stereotypic images of

Indigenous women" (Acoose, "Revisiting" 143) as a whole. Campbell shows her readers how crucial women are to the Métis community, and maintains a female-oriented view of the community throughout, a natural position for a female writer, but one that Campbell uses to good effect to convey her feminist interpretation of her people's narrative along with the details of her life story.

There are several striking female figures in the text, including Campbell's Cheechum, an independent woman who acts as her guide throughout the narrative; her maternal grandmother, Grannie Dubuque, who arrives every Christmas with boxes of clothing and treats for the whole family; her great-aunt Qua Chich, a widow who lives in a two-storey house and has "many cows and horses" (22), but who requires formal papers and a signature before she will loan money to any relative desperate enough to ask her for help (23). Campbell's mother is central to the family's survival, a fact that becomes clear when her death marks the beginning of the family's gradual disintegration. At the community level, too, it is the women who protect their children when the men drink and fight (36-37), and the sign of real decline in the community is that "little by little the women started to drink as well" (37).

Outstanding in this field of strong female figures is Cheechum, who maintains the theme of Métis defiance and endurance in the face of adversity. Since Campbell attributes her own strength to the teaching and determination of her Cheechum, understanding how that woman is represented as exemplary is key to understanding Campbell's process of resignifying what it means to be Métis. Cheechum is introduced as a niece of Gabriel Dumont, whose "whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont during the Rebellion"

(15), and who embodies the rejection of official Canadian history, according to which the Métis were defeated in 1885. Because the autobiography is structured around her, Cheechum is "a literary device, although no less real for that fact, and she serves to direct the thoughts and actions of the narrator as she develops her story" (Bataille and Sands 120). This device fits with the retrospective perspective of autobiographical form, which in this case is used for a decolonizing purpose: Campbell is looking back over her life and applying her adult perspective, often by focusing on Cheechum's behaviour and words. Cheechum provides the benefit of her experience to the young Campbell, who could not plausibly have the sort of insight the older woman offers about how the Métis were brought into a state of subjugation and how that state is maintained by the government and white society.

The description of Cheechum's personal life experiences seems to bear out the contention that she has never been defeated. After the death of her Scottish husband, she raises her son on her own, making a living by hunting, trapping, keeping a garden and being "completely self-sufficient" (15). Her relations with government institutions are conducted entirely on her own terms: she refuses to apply for welfare and when officers attempt to eject her from the government park land she is living on, she meets them with a loaded rifle and "[shoots] over their heads, threatening to hit them if they came any closer." The defiance works, says Campbell, since "They left her alone and she was never disturbed again" (15), one of the few instances in the text in which a Métis person succeeds against the white authorities through direct conflict and without being humiliated in the process. The elderly woman is Campbell's "best friend and confidante" who taught her "all she knew about living" (19).

That benign view of gentle teaching is altered in other scenes, where Cheechum uses whippings with a switch to correct what she considers aberrant behaviour. Her most stringent lesson comes when Campbell, after being teased at school for eating gophers and envying her white schoolmates for having cookies, cake, and fruit to eat, takes her frustration out on her parents by calling them "no-good Halfbreeds" (47). Cheechum explains to her how the Métis of the nineteenth century had been defeated by government policies aimed at creating internal divisions amongst them, in the same way that Campbell has just lashed out against her parents. She then beats the girl with a switch "until [her] legs and arms [a]re swollen with welts" (47). Having learned her lesson, thereafter Campbell always defends the other Métis children against the whites, "even when I knew we were wrong" (47).

Steven Hunsaker argues that this lesson, while it appears to enforce a sort of solidarity, actually distances Campbell from her Métis identity rather than reinforcing it:

> Attempts to enforce the ideology of group solidarity through lectures and corporal punishment fail. Far from opening her eyes to the need for unity, the whipping more firmly cements Campbell's resistance to identification with the Métis. Coercive means produce the opposite of the desired effect, revealing in the process the ideological – rather than the self-evident, natural, or necessary – quality of group identity. (42)

The existence of the autobiography itself seems to refute Hunsaker's contention that Campbell distances herself from her ethnic identity: she is, after all, presenting herself as the very representative figure of the "Halfbreed woman." Nevertheless, there is good reason for a reader to be confused about what we are to take as the basis of that identity, given Campbell's rejection of everything she associates with "European" culture or with white people in general, thereby ideologically repudiating not only some of the cultural attributes that were important to her ancestors but, more importantly, the value of métissage itself. It is this hollowing out and selective repudiation of métissage that I wish to further examine by contrasting, in the section that follows, the ways in which Campbell delineates a distinctively Métis ethnicity with the ways in which she erases or resignifies differences between Métis and Indians that are too closely associated with European or Euro-Canadian ancestry.

In contrast with the positive aspects of the Métis where Campbell sees "glimpses of a proud and happy people" (13), all of the negative aspects of Métis lives are a consequence of contact with and treatment by white people, a group that she thinks of as "nameless, faceless masses" (144). Although Cheechum is presented as Campbell's defiant and self-sufficient Métis ideal, key aspects of her life mark a disavowal of métissage. This begins with the story of Cheechum's marriage to a Scotsman who is violent and abusive. Campbell tells us that "They say he was very cruel and would beat his son, his wife, and his livestock with the same whip and with equal vengeance" (14). He supports the North West Mounted Police and white settlers during the Northwest Resistance, but Cheechum undermines him by passing information to the rebels and stealing ammunition from his store for them (14). Despite the vicious beatings she receives from her husband, Cheechum remains with him, inexplicably, until she is released by his death. The description of Cheechum remaining in a marriage where she and her child are abused by a vicious, jealous man seems at first strangely inconsistent with everything else we are told about her independence and refusal to place herself in a position of vulnerability to abuse by white people. It appears to be calculated, however, to act as the story that explains in terms of a woman's experience the defiant spirit that Cheechum passes on to Campbell. It also conveys the idea that from earliest times, the relationships that gave rise to métissage were characterized by brutal violence. This seminal story of the disastrously failed relationship between a white man and a Métis woman is echoed later in the relationship between Campbell and her husband Darrel.

The idea that relationships between Métis women and white men are inevitably abusive has come to be accepted as a general "truth" about the Métis. After observing that "Historically, Métis families were composed of European men and their Aboriginal 'country wives,'" for example, Laura Groening states that "For many Métis women, then, encounters with violence are both gendered and racialized" (139), taking it as understood that any and all relationships between white men and Native women are necessarily characterized by violence. Groening then lists the abusive relationships or rapes of Métis women by white men in texts written by female Métis authors (including Campbell) as supporting evidence for that assumption. In such texts, the abuse of Métis women by white men parallels and represents the treatment of Natives by whites on a larger scale, a parallel that may help explain why the voices and narratives of Métis women have been so central to the development of Native literature. The contact-as-violence assumption seems to make Métis women authors the very voice and embodiment of those first violated female ancestors.[58]

The death of the white husband frees Cheechum to become the strong woman that Campbell knows. Significantly, that strength derives in the first instance from a *retreat* from the Métis community. Returning to her mother's people, who are non-treaty "Indians" and therefore do not live on a reserve (15), Cheechum adopts a lifestyle and attitude calibrated to accept those aspects of Métisness (such as "defiance") that give her strength and in all other respects to be as Indian as possible. She refuses "to sleep on a bed or eat off a table" (19), puts bear grease in Campbell's hair, and moves out of the house altogether during visits from Grannie Dubuque, who "spoils" the children with new clothes and insists on eating bread instead of bannock (43). The contrast between Cheechum's personal lifestyle and that of Campbell's family is itself an indication that Cheechum's identity is much more inflected by her Indian background than by the norms of Métis life.

Through her behaviour and a series of value judgments, Cheechum communicates to Campbell that traditional Indian ways are more valuable than modern Métis ways. During a visit to a reserve at Montreal Lake, where treaty Indians live according to a more traditional lifestyle, Campbell describes a communal life that seems ideal, with old women and girls tending the fires and caring for the babies, groups of people playing an Indian "hand game" with drumming and singing (40), and women who seem "so free" (41), dressed in bright colours, jewellery and ribbons. Campbell feels that these people are "kin" because they too have blue eyes. Cheechum tells her that "we used to live in much the same way before the white people came" (41). As in most of Cheechum's teachings, Campbell is told here that she should identify with a "we" that predates colonial contact. This sort of subtle assertion that one can be Métis *and* have been here "before the white people came" reflects the distinction between the white fur traders who lived in relative harmony with Aboriginal peoples and white settlers who displaced and oppressed the Métis. The first group of whites are thus discursively absorbed into the idea of "Métis" so that a new oppositional "Métis/white" binary can be formed based on the second group of whites. Paradoxically, then, the discursive absorption of whiteness allows for it to be "forgotten" in texts, images, and discourses that posit the Métis as equivalent to a First Nation with a notional past extending back prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America.

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[58] Armando Jannetta points out that violence in itself is not portrayed as alien to Métis culture. He notes that in *Halfbreed*, "certain forms of physical violence among the Métis themselves are perceived as culturally acceptable, even amusing. For example, Campbell mentions several occasions when she was whipped for misbehaving either by her father or Cheechum, but there is no resentment in her voice. [...] 'violence,' devoid of its more brutal connotations, is treated as an aspect of Métis identity and a ritualistic event in which the women sometimes also took part" (124).

Campbell's suggestion that métissage provides some flexibility of identification – that having blue eyes, brown curly hair, light skin or other signs of "white" blood is no impediment to identifying fully with pre-Columbian ancestors – seems to work in only one direction, since identification with whites is now deemed a form of unacceptable assimilation. That is, Cheechum's life and teachings demonstrate, not the flexibility of identification, but a rigidification of identification within a narrow range from Métis (and even then, only certain aspects of Métisness) to "traditional" Indian, with the latter always the preferable choice. The elder woman acts as the conduit to a past that, moving back beyond 1885, skips directly to the pre-contact Indian as the true anchor of Métis identity. All that remains is to delegitimize and/or erase all signs of European culture in Métis lifeways.

The Authenticity Problem

To understand better the problem of defining authenticity or tradition in a hybrid culture, it is worth considering the issue of religion, arguably one of the most sensitive aspects of traditional Métis identity. Campbell's virulent treatment of Christian belief demonstrates most clearly her desire to reinterpret certain aspects of Métisness. Campbell goes to great pains in her autobiography to acknowledge the power of Catholicism within her community but also to decouple it from the Métis identity she wishes to project. She does this principally, again, through her Cheechum, initially by associating Christianity with her brutal husband. Cheechum tells Campbell that "she had married a Christian and if there was such a thing as hell then she had lived there" (15). After that, the older woman "hated [Christianity] with a vengeance" (32).

Although Campbell's mother is a devout Catholic, the author presents virtually every aspect of the Church's involvement in the community in a negative light. There is the "fat and greedy" priest who eats up the best part of the family's meals when he visits so that "After he left we had to eat the scraps" (29); there is the humiliation at the hands of Christian white people who give the Métis boxes of cast-off clothing. As a consequence, Campbell tells us, "By the time I reached the age of ten I had the same attitude as Cheechum about Christians, and even today I think of Christians and old clothes together" (28). Perhaps the most damning detail is the priest's refusal to bury Campbell's devout mother in consecrated ground after her death, because she had died too quickly to be given the last rites (70).

Campbell acknowledges that her views of Catholicism are not shared by her people (with the exception of Cheechum), and certainly not by her mother: "Our people talked against the government, their white neighbours and each other, but never against the church or the priest regardless of how bad they were" (32). She is amazed that her mother "was not even critical, because surely if a little girl could see the fat priest for what he was, then she could" (32). As in other aspects of Campbell's representation of the Métis, the disjunction between her own views and those of her mother are indicative that there is more to Métis identity than Campbell is telling us. Because she believes personally that the Catholic Church has had a negative impact on the Métis, she does not attempt to understand why "many Métis elders continue to embrace Christianity and understand it to be integral to their traditional Métis culture" (Leclair, "Memory" 161). Instead, she treats it as a particularly objectionable part of a false European culture forced on the Métis by a predatory Church.

In her study of *The Book of Jessica*, a text co-authored by Campbell and Linda Griffiths (a white actor and playwright who wrote a play based on Campbell's life and portrayed her on the stage), Maureen Slattery argues that the question of religion and Campbell's attitude toward "the white in her" are intimately linked. The problem derives from the direct link Campbell sees among four elements: the Catholic religion, whiteness, colonization and, most devastatingly, her mother. As a devoutly Catholic woman, Campbell's mother represents her own white side to her. But since Campbell sees Catholicism as a foreign, colonizing force that turns her mother into a passive victim, she cannot reject the cultural and biological elements of the equation without also rejecting her mother. Campbell had to "'rip down the foundation of Christianity' to find the Grandmother at the heart of her native culture," Slattery tells us, and therefore "she did not want to own the mother under her skin" (142) because she saw her as "radically Other" (140).

In tackling the problem of how to reconcile herself with her mother's "whiteness," Campbell is actually addressing the question of how best to live her hybridity. She sees herself as "a woman struggling with two cultures" who must find a balance because "when she leaned into one, a part of her got lost, so she [had] to lean into the other one and try to understand and find a balance" (Griffiths and Campbell17). Campbell adopts the Native value of achieving balance as the proper way to "be" racio-culturally hybrid. This notion can be contrasted with other paradigms for hybridity, such as Homi Bhabha's ambivalent "third space" ("Third" 207) or Québec philosopher Alexis Noüss's utopian conception of hybridity as the ability to leap unproblematically between cultures (102). Campbell's position would seem to be the most challenging of all, given the risk, if the balance cannot be maintained, of falling back into the stereotypical position of the "confused and alienated Halfbreed" (Episkenew 57) or becoming mired in "double-barrelled hatred for the Indian and non-Indian selves" (Kalafatic 112).

The idea of hybridity as the possibility of leaping between cultures is impossible for the Métis as envisioned by Campbell because to her, white people and "white" culture are the enemy. The more playful ideals of hybridity posited by postcolonial theory may be practicable on an individual basis, but they cannot work at the collective level, given the desire of the group to establish a singular identity (flexible as that may be). Even at the individual level, in Canada, ethnic identities are "chosen and not just inherited" because people "buy into the ancestral stock with which [they] most wish to identify. It is the perceived cultural attributes of that ethnicity which appeal and with which [they] wish to be associated" (Constantine 153). Furthermore, says Stephen Constantine, there is a growing tendency to construct ethnic groups in Canada – not only First Nations but also Eastern European and even Scottish ethnicity – as victims, to the point where "it seems that victim status has become for many a desirable cultural attribute" (154). Indeed, Campbell suggests to Griffiths in *The Book of Jessica* that the actor would gain important knowledge about herself by learning more about "[her] own history" (35), meaning the history of her Scottish ancestors. What Campbell has in mind is not some idle foray into her family tree or colourful material culture, but an examination of the history of the Highland Scots as victims of land dispossession, torture, and starvation at the hands of the English. For Campbell, sharing a history of victimization would have a levelling effect between the two women. She tells Griffiths that "the history of your pain and all the things that happened to your people was exactly the same as our history. I couldn't understand why you refused to look at that. It seemed that that would be a meeting place for us" (Griffiths and Campbell 35). This suggestion clearly points to Campbell's belief that ethnic identity is most fundamentally defined by the group's history of victimization, echoing Renan's contention that adversities suffered and sacrifices made are what give true value to a collective identity (34).

From a historical perspective, the problem with Campbell's presentation of Métis Catholicism as victimization is that it is not clear that this tradition should be seen as an effect of colonial domination. Many Métis in the nineteenth century were Catholic to some degree. Far from having been "plucked from his home by a patronizing order of priests, and placed in a foreign institution" (LaRocque, "Native Writers" 151), Louis Riel was sent with the full consent of his parents, who were themselves devout Catholics (Siggins 30-32, 47; Martel 90).[59] LaRocque's revisionist view, which turns Riel into a victim of the Catholic Church on a par with the Native victims of residential schools in the twentieth century, seems aimed at adjusting his credentials to accord them with post-1885 Métis views of the Church. Riel's Catholicism makes him problematic as a contemporary Métis hero; many Métis focus on Gabriel Dumont as a more acceptable, less Europeanized hero figure. Certainly, Riel's brand of Catholicism – which evolved into a Catholic messianism based on his conviction that the Métis had been given a divine mission to take over the Papacy and renew the Church in the New World (Martel 149, 176-77, 244-48) – was something unique to him. Yet there is no denying that Catholicism was a "traditional" part of Métis life virtually from the time when the Métis began to think of themselves as a separate people. It had been brought by the fur traders from French Canada and was inculcated in their children, who welcomed the arrival of priests and nuns in the early part of the nineteenth century.[60]

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[59] The most telling evidence is, of course, Riel's writings themselves, every page of which reflects his profound devotion to his Catholic beliefs, a devotion that he believes characterizes the Métis in general as the only group in the North-West on whom the priests can depend not to fall away from the Church, as occurs with others who live in contact with non-believers (2: 408-9).

Everyday practice of Catholicism is indicated in accounts such as that of buffalo hunter Norbert Welsh, who quotes Scripture (Weekes 8), prays to the Virgin Mary to help him as he tries to get a sick comrade across a river (30), consults a priest about what to do with the presents he has received at a Giving Away Dance (49-50), and organizes the construction of a chapel at Cypress Hills so that a missionary can give the children religious instruction (95-96). Similarly, in his description of the Métis buffalo hunt, Alexander Ross tells us that hunting was prohibited on Sundays (249). A priest would usually accompany the brigade to hold mass, teach the children, and bless the hunters before they set out (Giraud 2:808; Ens 23). The Métis buffalo hunters have often been depicted as the most authentically indigenous (and therefore the least Europeanized) parts of the nineteenth-century Métis community, yet this demonstration of a "European" religious habit as a natural part of the Métis lifestyle is indicative of a deeply ingrained

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[60] Trémaudan reports that the first priests were sent from Montreal to Red River after receipt of a petition sent in 1817 by Lord Selkirk to Monseigneur Plessis bearing sixteen French names and four Scots names (113). According to Ens, the settlement of St. François Xavier first received church services in 1824 dispensed by the priest resident in St Boniface (22). Lussier (writing in 1978) states that "The influence of the Church was, and always has been a vital factor in the Métis way of life" and that "The church and its teachings touched every aspect of Métis life. In economic, social, religious and, later on, political affairs, the influence of the Catholic Church can be traced" (18). Payment traces the more stormy relationship between the Métis and the Catholic Church after 1885 (*Free People* 107-39). Huel examines in detail the causes of the 1885 break between the Oblates and the Métis, but concludes that, ironically, "In the twentieth-century Métis, the Oblates found the underprivileged community that was central to their existence as a missionary congregation" (29).

Catholicism that cannot be so easily dismissed by Campbell's suggestion that Natives comply only because they believe that otherwise "they would roast in hell" (31).

This is where Campbell demonstrates most tellingly the stresses involved in working out a new identity that is both true to the past and supportive of the contemporary needs and aspirations of the Métis people. It is understandable that Christianity in general and Catholic institutions in particular should have become suspect once they became perceived as part of the structures of colonial control. Campbell's ferocious rejection of Catholicism as thoroughly "un-Métis" in any era indicates, however, that this particular topic holds a deeper psychological significance for her: it is not sufficient merely to say that the Métis were Catholic before but have now turned away from the Church. She feels compelled to attack Christianity at the roots, so to speak, to absolve the historical Métis from the perceived taint of having been not the victims but the supporters of colonial institutions. The parallel Campbell draws between Christianity and whiteness shows how an abstract cultural feature can be equated with biological race. As a result, when one is discredited, the other is too. The discrediting is done, in turn, by equating a natural cultural transference in the case of the Métis with what is now understood to be the victimization of Indian people by missionaries who robbed them of their own spiritual traditions. Again, the latter-day "indigenization" of the Métis is understood to confer on them, retroactively, the same cultural status as Indians. That is the thinking that makes it possible for Campbell to state that "It was those white people that *came along* and did this to us, made us hate ourselves" (Griffiths and Campbell 31, emphasis added), positioning the Métis, paradoxically, as pre-existing the arrival of white people or, only slightly more logically, discursively erasing the white part from the Métis make-up.

The overarching message of *Halfbreed* is thus that contact with whites undermines the Métis in every way. It is in attempting to square that fact of contemporary Métis reality with the history of middle ground métissage that problems arise in maintaining the Métis in the position of victims. The tensions and inconsistencies within Campbell's narrative are indicative of a fundamental discomfort with the very idea of métissage. If "white" people are the enemy, then they cannot be acknowledged as an integral part of the Métis themselves. Because Campbell's "history" of the Métis begins long after the point of originary métissage, that hidden pre-history acts as a haunting presence behind the story of the contemporary Métis whose lives are made hellish by white people. Rather than to examine how the ironic move from "white ancestor" to "white persecutor" has taken place, Campbell writes a narrative that reflects discomfort with that ironic switch by, on one hand, remaining silent about that pre-history and, on the other hand, hinting through the story of Cheechum's marriage that métissage was based from the outset on abuse of Indian women by white men.

The idea that métissage is a shameful part of Native history has generally been maintained in Métis texts that touch on historical themes, as I discuss in Chapter Five. Alongside Campbell's story of a "forgotten" Métis community persisting into the twentieth century, however, must be placed the story that represents yet another phenomenon that arose from the "defeat" of 1885. In the years and decades that followed Batoche, many Métis who were able to pass as white did so, quietly assimilating into white society to avoid the very ostracism and poverty that Campbell details so vividly. The story of "ethnic rediscoverers," or people who have learned about a hidden Métis background, is another kind of Métis narrative that has a particular purchase in Canada.[61] This sort of story has been told, for example, by Gregory Scofield in his autobiography *Thunder through My Veins*, by academics Olive Dickason (in her article "Out of the Bush: A Journey to a Dream"), and Bonita Lawrence in the introduction to her book on mixed-blood people in Canada (xi-xv). In the documentary film *Foster Child*, Gil Cardinal tells of his search for his Métis parents after being adopted by a non-Native family. The story told by filmmaker Christine Welsh shows in greater detail how the history of métissage fits into the reconstruction – or the recovery – of a contemporary Métis identity.

***Women in the Shadows*: Uncovering the History of Métissage**

In *Women in the Shadows* (1991), Christine Welsh tells about rediscovering her lost Métis identity in a story that illustrates some of the perverse effects of racial discrimination and assimilation. In the mid-twentieth century, Welsh's father had passed as white in order to avoid discrimination. Welsh had been raised as culturally Euro-Canadian, but her recognizably racialized features made her racial background obvious to others: on the playground, schoolmates call her "nichi," and "it wasn't long before I understood that to them it meant 'dirty Indian'" ("Voices" 16). When her teacher makes an oblique reference to Welsh's Métis background, she realizes that "no matter how hard I tried to hide it, my native background seemed to be written all over me" (16). Elderly family members who might shed light on the family history of métissage are unwilling to speak about it. In an effort to find a cultural setting that matches her racial identification, Welsh tries to fit into Indian society but finds that "I was continually made aware that here, too, I was an outsider – this time because I was too 'white'" (17). In the end, Welsh uses her skills as a filmmaker to construct a narrative that helps her understand her own experience and that, not incidentally, mirrors the trajectory of those Métis people who, unlike Campbell's family, chose assimilation as a way to "escape desperate lives of oppression and grinding poverty" (23).[62] Welsh's experience shows that race cannot be completely discounted as a factor in cultural identity: it is because of the disconnect between her felt race and her ascribed race (that is, the Euro-Canadian racial identification chosen by her father and grandparents) that Welsh feels compelled to unravel the mystery behind that disconnect so that, if nothing else, she can understand why it exists and thereby come to terms with it.

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[61] Vsevolod Isajiw defines ethnic rediscoverers as "persons from any consecutive ethnic generation who have been socialised into the culture of the general society but who develop a symbolic relation to the

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culture of their ancestors" (15). Jannetta discusses this issue in the context of contemporary Métis and Native American politics (36-45).

[62] The situation described by Welsh, in which she (but presumably not her siblings – she does not discuss this in the film) inherits phenotypical features that indicate Indian ancestry within the family's genes, has been repeated in some form within many families across the prairies. See Warren Cariou for a discussion of the phenomenon, which he refers to as the "Indian in the woodpile" ("Epistemology" 909). Donna Sutherland has written a similar account of searching for a missing Kokum (grandmother) in order to fill an "ancestral void." She notes that this is part of an effort to augment the Canadian historical record, which is "full of voids in relation to women's histories – especially Native women's histories" (325).

In her search for knowledge about her aboriginal ancestry, Welsh traces her roots back to the moment of originary métissage: to her great-great-great-grandmother Jane, a Cree woman who married George Taylor, a Scotsman working as a sloopmaster for the Hudson's Bay Company at York Factory in the late eighteenth century. After living with Jane for twenty years and raising a family with her, Taylor returned to Scotland, leaving his partner and children behind. This abandonment taints the relationship for Welsh, who shuts the door on her white ancestor, saying "I know nothing more of him, my English grandfather – but I know his bones are not here." The reciprocal rejection of the male ancestor and the resulting deligitimizing of miscegenation has the effect of erasing whiteness as a valid constituent element of métissage. Again, it represents métissage as the victimization of Indian women by applying retroactively over the entire relationship a moral judgment about how the relationship ended.

The story of the abandonment of the Indian wife by the white colonizer is reinforced by the experience of Jane and George's daughter, Margaret Taylor, who was the country wife[63] of HBC Governor George Simpson for years in the early nineteenth century until he shunted her aside in order to marry a white woman from England. Simpson has been seen as an arch-villain in fur trade race relations for flouting the standard practices of marriage and fidelity. Sylvia Van Kirk tells us that "it had been customary, particularly for the Nor'Westers, to leave their Indian wives behind, even though they might take their children with them. Most bourgeois who married mixed-blood women, however, did not follow this course but took their entire family with them when they returned to Eastern Canada" (*"Many Tender Ties"* 123). The image of Simpson as the man who single-handedly altered the racist temperature of Western Canada for the worse has entered popular history through characterizations such as this one by Aritha van Herk: "He felt, of course, that every beautiful woman in the country should be made available to him, and had a string of mistresses, whom he called 'bits of brown' and treated much as he treated company pots and pans, with finely honed contempt" (64).

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[63] There is no evidence that Taylor and Simpson were actually married *à la façon du pays*, that is, according to local customs. This form of marriage was recognized by the Montreal Superior Court as legitimate and binding when celebrated in "Indian Country" (Brown, "Partial Truths" 73-76). Nevertheless, lengthy cohabitation was generally understood in the fur trade society to constitute a form of marriage.

Against these assumptions of sheer racist abhorrence for Native women, Heather Driscoll argues that Simpson's treatment of Margaret Taylor was primarily motivated by a desire for status. He did, after all, happily live with Taylor for years, and continued to support the marriage of HBC men to Native women, recognizing that these relationships were a crucial part of the trade. Driscoll points out that it was only when he became Governor of the HBC that Simpson felt compelled to marry from outside the community, in order to establish a distinction from the officers beneath him. Since the HBC functioned according to a patriarchal family model of power, Simpson as the "post patriarch" could be "differentiated from the majority of married employees by the aura of contrast surrounding his wife" (99), who looked and acted differently from other wives. It was because racial intermarrying and métissage had become such a standard part of fur trade society that Simpson felt compelled to seek out a white wife as a sign of higher status, alongside the fast paddlers he reserved for himself to travel at impressive speeds across the prairies, and the piper he hired to play the bagpipes to announce his arrival at a fort (98). Still, it is difficult to separate the idea of racist intent from the racist outcome of Simpson's actions, since the idea that racial difference has special significance and the belief in and enforcement of a hierarchy on the basis of that difference fit the very definition of racism.

By making Margaret Taylor and George Simpson the centrepiece of her storying of métissage, Welsh establishes them as a sort of quintessential contact couple in Canadian history. This story fits our cultural codes around contact history, which are still based on the assumption that contact means violence and domination of one side over the other rather than mutual accommodation. That is, the new interpretations of fur trade métissage as taking place in a middle ground have not penetrated broader cultural interpretations in Canada, and they are unlikely to do so any time soon because of the purchase that narratives such as Welsh's have gained.

As a result of our reigning cultural codes, a scenario such as Simpson's exploitation and rejection of Taylor is seen as typical or representative of métissage. We are used to imagining interracial sexual liaisons as arising from either love or violence – or in Terry Goldie's terms, as part of the "fear and temptation" that characterize the "semiotic field of the indigene" (*Fear* 17) – so that we cannot imagine other, more complex or perhaps more mundane motivations. We have accepted a general notion of post-Columbian contact as generally applicable throughout the Americas. The way in which Rafael Pérez-Torres frames the historical background for the theme of miscegenation in Chicano culture sums up equally the way in which it is now understood in Canada: as stemming from the "enslavement, genocide, and oppression of indigenous populations" (154). Pérez-Torres states that "the processes that wrought our mestizo conditions were (and are) forged in the heat and hatred of violence" (154).

Welsh interprets the shame attached to métissage as a reflection of the hidden history of racial hatred and the violence of abandonment that she has uncovered in her family's past. For her, the "thick web of denial, shame, bitterness and silence that had obscured my past" begins not in 1885, but much earlier, at that moment of abandonment of the Métis wife. Welsh then generalizes that experience, seeing it as emblematic of "a larger collective experience that is uniquely and undeniably Métis" ("Voices" 21). Because it does not contain the story of the Métis nation as a political and cultural unit in the nineteenth century, and because she wishes to understand her story as representative of more than just one family's or one woman's experience (otherwise there is little interest in making a film about it), Welsh locates the moment of Métis "defeat" within the very process and context of métissage itself. In that sense, betrayal and absence become the very fabric of Métis existence for her, as she sadly concludes that "Amnesia, and silence, and a haunting sense of loss: these are my inheritance" ("Women"). The only way to retrieve something positive from that history is to tell the story, not only for personal reconciliation with the past but also to restore continuity with the Native women whose voices are silenced by the male-dominated structures of official history. Welsh believes that thus "Native women will be rendered historically voiceless no longer. We are engaged in creating a new history, [...] speaking not only for ourselves but for those who came before us whom history has made mute. We have a responsibility to our children and our people to ensure that the voices of our grandmothers are no longer silent" ("Voices" 24).

Understanding the story of Taylor and Simpson as one of sexual exploitation and racial prejudice in a colonial context fits with this picture of New World contact as violence. But Welsh's question to her Cree guide about the relationship between Margaret's parents indicates that the bonds between the originary ancestors of Métis people are a source of puzzlement, not so straightforwardly categorized as mere colonial desire (after all, living together and raising children together for 20 years must involve something more than a momentary physical attraction for an "other" who becomes, at some point, much more familiar than that word implies). Welsh asks, "Do you think love entered into it? Was that even part of what went on, why they got together?" Lilin Colley responds: "I always hope it did, but I think it was so much hard work that if there was love, we wouldn't recognize it as such" ("Women"). The actual motivations behind originary métissage do not make for dramatic literary material: in Western Canada, historians explain métissage both demographically and socioeconomically. In demographic terms, the European and Canadian men in the fur trade needed wives, for otherwise they would not remain on the job, and the women available for marriage were Indian women. But there are also the reasons that Colley gives, that the men needed the women both for their labour in the fur trade and for the kinship relations that constituted a basis for actual trading, while the women gained prestige and material support by marrying a white fur trader (*Women*). The idea of mixed marriages as mutually beneficial is the fundamental idea of the middle ground elaborated by fur trade historians (Havard 634-46; Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"* 28-55; R. White 50-104).

The impulse in historical studies to reinterpret the role of Indian women in the fur trade was part of the feminist move in scholarship that rejected the old assumptions about women's passivity and victimization and insisted on regarding them as subjects exerting different forms of agency over their own lives (Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"* 73-80). Welsh's laudable goal of restoring female voices to Canadian history may be undermined by her assumption that those voices will inevitably tell stories of colonial violence, mistreatment, and rejection. Certainly, there was plenty of that. Jennifer Brown tells us that "Scholars looking at the more negative aspects of the fur trade have found ample grounds to argue that abuse of women, neglect, prostitution, family breakup, and other social problems were also part of the fur trade life" ("Partial" 62).[64] Nevertheless, the history of relative Métis autonomy and even dominance in the West from 1819 to 1870 gives us a picture of resistance to colonial control, a resistance that was successful for decades. Although women's voices are missing from the historical record of that period, the Métis community could not have grown and thrived without the active participation of its women.

The similarities and differences in how Welsh and Campbell use Métis history and shape it into narrative show that "people fashion their identity by identifying with cultural symbols and by narrating a place in the world" (Kortenaar 31): both focus on the figure of the grandmother as the key to understanding their Métisness. Parallels or resonances between the grandmother's story and their own stories (mistreatment by a white husband in Campbell's case and a sense of loss and mourning in Welsh's) create a sort of narrative genetic link that re-establishes a continuity threatened by colonial policies and ideologies. For Campbell, her own politicization and "talking back" to colonialism have their source in her Cheechum's strength and defiance against white domination. For Welsh, who is haunted by a feeling of sadness and loss, locating the source of that feeling in her grandmother's experience is a redemptive moment. She is able to see her family's silence "not as a betrayal but as the survival mechanism that it most certainly was" ("Voices" 23). Both narratives are equally "true" in that they reflect the different outcomes for Métis people generated by the historical course of colonialism in Western Canada. More importantly, however, is the very fact of Métis authorship, since "the capacity of the colonized to fit their experience into a narrative indicates the community's resilience" (Kortenaar 40). Mere genetic inheritance is meaningless on its own, as are cultural practices, which change over time: only narrative is able to maintain collective identity, and those narratives that are best able to capture the details and emotions of lived experience are the ones that gain acceptance and authority as representative.

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[64] For further detail, see Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"* 83-90.

What is strikingly missing – excised – from these accounts, is the ancestral white father. Figured in both accounts as abusive or at the very least indifferent, one is dispensed with through his death (which Campbell tells us was rumoured to have been at the hands of Cheechum's family) and the other relegated to the mists of Scotland.

Narratives of abuse or betrayal justify removing these men from the picture. Still, as authoritative stories of métissage, it is significant that neither account contains a positive picture of a European or Euro-Canadian ancestor. When Campbell does feel compelled to deal with her negative feelings about the whiteness in her, those feelings are projected onto her mother – another Halfbreed woman – rather than onto a white father or grandfather. As a result, the basic narrative of métissage is more one of survival of abusive contact than it is one of agency or choice.

As Monika Kaup tells us, there is an interesting contrast to be made between Campbell's narrative and that of Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana who realized the importance for her own self-image of grappling with the old narrative of Spanish conquest and *mestizaje* as one of Indian women's victimization. Anzaldúa undertakes a difficult effort to reinterpret the relationship between La Malinche and Hernán Cortés (the symbolic Indian mother and white father of Mexican *mestizaje*), a narrative that had hitherto been controlled by the masculinist view according to which La Malinche was nothing but a debased and powerless Indian woman. Merely reversing the characterization by asserting that La Malinche chose her course of action leads to the conclusion that she collaborated with the enemy, hardly an improvement in her image. Anzaldúa's approach is to counter "the scapegoating of women as traitors in the discourse of Mexican nationalism" (Kaup 193) by turning away from the past and expounding a "new *mestiza* consciousness" oriented toward the future, the consciousness of the mixed-blood woman who "embraces the utopian potential of her hybrid identity" (195) based on willed territorial and cultural mobility (196-97).

Constructing a positive narrative of originary métissage would presumably be easier in Canada because of the new understanding of the fur trade as middle ground, but for the time being no authoritative narrative has arisen to challenge Campbell's. Because the historical as well as the notional or mythological "white father" (or grandfather) of history is missing from the picture, there is no tangible representation of a positive whiteness in the make-up of Métis mixed-bloodedness. At the same time, Métis consciousness in Canada is strongly tied to Métis history as a guarantor of the longevity and authenticity of collective identity. So the white component that is an inexpungible part of what constitutes the Métis difference continues to be treated as more of a cross to bear or an aberration to be explained away than it is something to be cherished and explored, as is the case with Indian ancestry.

Campbell uses the power of narrative to shape Métis cultural identity by moving Métis women who do not fit her ideal onto the sidelines of her story. Kortenaar argues convincingly that "Communities are constituted not by the possession of a shared culture that shapes the individual and makes him or her a replicate in miniature of the whole but rather by the ongoing debate over what the shared culture is, how members should behave, and what children should be taught" (31). Campbell intervenes in such a debate over Métis culture by presenting her aunt Qua Chich (with her large house and many cattle and horses) and her own mother (with her devout Catholicism and reserved ways) as "un-Métis," while on the contrary, she portrays her Cheechum with her Cree spirituality and cultural attributes as the more "authentically" Métis person.

Cheechum appears as the exemplary figure in Campbell's autobiography because she is the only person who is able to understand individual situations or events from a broader perspective and use her wisdom to apply an interpretation that lifts the situations out of the pain and frustration of the moment. The final resolution of the plot of inexorable Métis decline comes when Campbell realizes that Cheechum's real message was a political one, "that I [should] go out and discover for myself the need for leadership and change: if our way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative" (143). At the end of the book, Campbell calls on a "you," apparently addressing all Native people, to "set aside our differences and come together as one," so that "together we will fight our common enemies" (156). Echoing her Cheechum's words that "It will come, my girl, someday it will come" (67), Campbell asserts that "Change will come because this time we won't give up" (157). In this way, the new Métis position is set out as a spirit of defiance passed on directly from a niece of Gabriel Dumont through to contemporary Métis (and through them to other Aboriginal people), as conveyed by Campbell through her autobiography. As Slattery puts it, "[Campbell's] theme of brief paradise, loss, and recovery is the archetypal story of her people. She is the new Cheechum" (141) – the ideal, strongly indigenized Métis.

Essence vs. Construction in a Métis Context

The critical reception of *Halfbreed* is an important indicator of how contentious métissage is within Native literary criticism, since that reception has ranged over the years across positions from constructionism through to its polar opposite, essentialism.

Discussions of the problem of essence versus construction of Native identity have become standard fare in Native literary criticism. Susan Bernardin calls this "the authenticity game, a circular game in which the identification of a text's 'Indian' features gets entangled with assigning that self-same text as culturally informant or race representative" (160). The discussion is even more fraught in a Métis context because it involves the complication of inherent hybridity – that is, hybridity as part of the definition of the "Métis" rather than as an extraneous element of the "Indian." As Warren Cariou explains,

> Much First Nations literature deals with questions of essentialism and authenticity, but these issues can be even more problematic for people of mixed heritage. To be 'in-between' the established racial norms often causes crises of identification. However, the acknowledgment of hybridity can also be seen as a radical claim of self-determination, and an act of resistance against the colonial imperative of clarifying racial boundaries. ("Hybrid Imaginings" 141)

Hybridity does not, however, automatically dispense with ideas of racial purity. Rainier Spencer argues, in the context of Black-white mixed race in the United States, for example, that the very existence of a category of persons defined by their "mixed race" requires that racial boundaries continue to be recognized so that the "mixing" can take place. As Spencer puts it, "We are therefore left with the ironic and inconsistent coincidence that current projections of multiracial identity as representing the end of race are based precisely on the continual reproduction of Afro-American parents as monoracially black through the selective application of hypo-descent, or, the 'one-drop' rule" (85). There is never a point, Spencer argues, when mixed race becomes the norm, because previous generations of mixed-race people are simply reconfigured as racially pure "black" people.

The Métis have to some extent escaped the dynamic Spencer describes because of the historical establishment of the Métis nation as a singular ethnoracial group. Since endogamous métissage became the norm within the Red River Métis community in the nineteenth century (St. Onge 121-22; Gallagher 52-53), there was no need for continued exogamous métissage (through intermarrying between Indians and whites) to maintain the Métis as a group. Indeed, when Campbell states that Métis "marry either their own kind or Indians" while "It is more common among Indians to marry a white" (24), she is suggesting that endogamous métissage is legitimate, while exogamous métissage is not. Rejecting endogamous métissage is, in turn, Campbell's most effective expression of self-hatred when, angry at the Métis man she loves, she yells at him, "Marry you? You've got to be joking! I'm going to do something with my life besides make more Half-breeds!" (101).

Defining Métis hybridity is problematic in the state of current discourse on both race and culture, since hybridity is usually construed as the opposite of essentialism in racial terms (Werbner 226) or authenticity in cultural terms (Kortenaar 30). Under this configuration, the phrase "authentic Métis culture" would be an oxymoron, yet clearly there are many Métis who see their culture as authentic, and not merely a mixed jumble or *bricolage* of borrowings from other cultures.

Those who see cultural hybridity as the particular forte of the Métis emphasize their ability to act as "cultural go-between[s]" (Leclair, "Métis Wisdom" 123). Others prefer to emphasize the specificity of Métis culture and their position as the "people who own themselves,"[65] in the sense that they define themselves according to their own history and possess a full and autonomous – not contingent or partial – ethnicity. Since hybridity is one of the few attributes that defines *all* Métis people (especially today, when the term has expanded to include larger numbers of Native people with diverse backgrounds far from Red River), the latter position amounts to an "essential hybridity" that confers on the Métis the necessary credentials to participate in Native political and social life. The idea of an "essential" (or born) Indian is fundamental to Native political and cultural self-definition, so that Métis people risk exclusion if they are seen to move too close to the "white" side of the hybrid equation.

Much of the variation within Métis self-representations is a result of jockeying between those two positions – people-in-between or people-for-themselves – or efforts to encompass both at the same time. In the discussion that follows, the former definition is termed the "constructionist" view, in which the Métis are seen as defined by their cultural positioning, a positioning that can be changed or "constructed" according to the current needs of the community. The latter definition is the "essentialist" view, according to which the Métis are defined by certain fundamental attributes passed down from their ancestors.

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[65] Devine, "Les Desjarlais" 152. This phrase translates the Cree term for the Métis, *Otepimsiwak*, which derives historically from the origins of the Métis as "freemen," which referred to "those *Canadien* and eastern Indian *engagés* who chose to end their employment in the direct service of the major trading companies and live independently, hunting and trapping alongside local native groups with whom they had established kin relationships" (129-30).

Critical interpretations of *Halfbreed* have used the text to support both views of Métis hybridity, likely because, as I have outlined, Campbell provides evidence for both. Métis critic Jodi Lundgren, like Cariou, believes that assumptions about the biological basis for Native identity are problematic for the Métis, given their mixed racial heritage. She argues that Campbell solves that difficulty by basing Métis identity on ethnicity instead of race, and sees "syncreticity" (62) as the main feature of that ethnicity, based on the ethno-linguistic and cultural mixing present in the Métis community that Campbell describes (66). Yet, as Kaup points out, the terms in which Campbell fashions her ethnic identity tend to negate rather than emphasize the potential of hybridity, since "Campbell's hopeful prospect of the renewal of métis culture is marred by a deeper forgetting of the hybrid dynamics of cross-cultural identity. Its defining note is the affirmation of métis survival, rather than the recovery of the métis heritage of 'openness to others' that drove the process of hybridization in fur trade society" (206). Lundgren points out that Campbell extends the Métis "principle of inclusivity" to "the expression of solidarity with other people of colour" (66), but expressly bars white people from inclusion (67) – a statement of Métis ethnicity that is politically rather than a historically founded.

Without addressing the issue of inherited versus constructed identity, Agnes Grant holds that Campbell effectively dispels the negative view of the Métis as "hopelessly caught between two cultures" (126) and replaces it with a more benign portrait of hybridity. "Until [Campbell] wrote the book," Grant tells us, "'halfbreed' was nothing but a common derogatory term; now it means a person living between two cultures" (128). The fine distinction between what it means to be "caught between" and "living between" cultures might seem rather too subtle for many, but the main difference would appear to be the sense of agency present in the notion of actively "living," as opposed to being passively "caught," as in a trap. This distinction is in fact a major one, since it goes to the way in which Native people view the difference and the relationship between the "Indian world" and the "white world," a subject that I develop in Chapter Five.

At the other extreme on the "essence-construction" spectrum lie critics such Joanne DiNova, who insists that we should understand Campbell's text as the expression of the "essential Métis" (109) and that it is dangerous to view any Native identity as constructed rather than "essential," or inherited by blood ties. DiNova believes that the idea of the Métis living between two cultures "may appeal to an academic audience, but that [such arguments] simultaneously negate the Métis as a people by assigning them to a constructed between-ness" (110). To DiNova, accepting the constructedness of Indian (which to her includes Métis) race represents the thin end of the wedge leading to a denial of any basis for aboriginal land claims or cultural and political sovereignty.

Even those critics who emphasize the ethnicity or constructedness of Métis identity in *Halfbreed* seem prepared to accept it as a construction that in effect has the weight of an essence. Jannetta, for example, sees the autobiographical genre as particularly apt for a Métis writer because it is a "hybrid/'half-breed' or go-between for fiction and historiography, oscillating between them in an un- or underdefined space, full of creative potential and freedom" that is "especially suitable to express Métis experiences and values" (100). Yet he then describes Campbell as directing all of that creative potential and freedom toward recuperating a Native self under the guidance of her Cheechum and expressing it in resistant or subversive "Native" forms such as anecdote, dialogism, humour, and holism (114-133). For Jannetta, then, the freedom inherent in Métis hybridity goes to construct a purely "Native" narrative form.

My own position, as indicated earlier, is that we should understand Campbell's intervention as a construction rather than a transparent description of a pre-existing group identity transmitted by blood. Kwame Anthony Appiah's insights on the nature of constructed identities must be kept in mind, however. As Appiah points out, the reality lies somewhere between the ideas that "there is just an authentic nugget of selfhood, the core that is distinctively me, waiting to be dug out" and "the notion that I can simply make up any self I choose" (107). Instead, identities are made up from "a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we don't, individually, determine the options among which we choose" (107). At the collective level, culture is a reservoir of potential practices that social actors can make use of when renegotiating collective identity (Amselle, *Logiques* 10). The construction of a Métis (or any hybrid) identity is particularly complex merely because the "tool kit" or reservoir of potential practices available is much more extensive than for most cultures. In addition, the (cultural and ethical) value attached to some of its contents has been transformed by forces inside and outside the Métis community. Pressures within the Native community to consider First Nations identities as essential translate into the invalidation of some of the contents of that kit: the English and French languages and Catholicism, for example, are no longer considered valid parts of the cultural repertoire on offer, though French is less often explicitly rejected, perhaps because it is an unthreatening minority language and because of the links between French and Michif.[66] Because those cultural attributes have been discredited by their association with colonial control, they are no longer deemed acceptable components of a Métis identity. Although English is used by most Western Métis authors, it is used as the "enemy's language" (LaRocque, "Native Writers" 43), a language that Campbell is "appropriating" (Acoose, "Revisiting" 140), rather than one of the traditional languages of the Métis.

Cultural attributes that are less contentious than religion or language have remained in the tool kit unproblematically: flower beadwork, for example, in which both the beads and the flower design are of European origin, is considered an integral part of Métis culture. In that case, there is no pressure to insist that pre-Columbian style of geometrical patterns using porcupine quills is the only "authentic" form of decorative work. Similarly, the typically Métis food bannock, an adaptation of the Scottish scone, is a cherished part of that culture.[67] The Métis practice of Catholicism, more ideologically loaded, has become an optional attribute that is not often openly asserted in literary form, perhaps because it is contentious and therefore cannot be used to rebuild or affirm collective identity. Conversely, the annual pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, a significant spiritual site for both Métis and First Nations, serves precisely that purpose ("First Catholic" 1, 7).[68]

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[66] Nevertheless, standard French is rejected in favour of Cree Michif or French Michif (see Sing, "Intersections" for a detailed analysis of the use of Michif in Métis texts and its broader cultural and political significance).

[67] See Sing, "Une 'nouvelle' tradition littéraire," for an analysis of bannock as symbol in Métis literature. Sharon Blady's discussion of Métis beadwork, though it suffers from the lack of primary sources, offers an interesting interpretation of beadwork as an expression of Métis women's power.

In the end, as Kortenaar emphasizes, what is important in negotiating personal and collective identities is not the specific contents or how they are assembled but the very activity of turning them into stories. Essentialist or constructivist positions alike are "rhetorical," not in the sense that they are feigned or shallow, but in the sense that they serve to turn the life of the collective into an identity narrative. That is why the most devastating operation of colonial domination is to take away language and to suppress enactments of culture in the form of storytelling and ritual. While those actions are sometimes considered the least brutal parts of colonialism (compared to rape, torture, starvation, warfare, disease, and the like), it could be argued that a group can survive all of those things as long as it can continue to narrate its existence, passing on the stories of the past and transforming the experiences of the present, no matter how devastating, into narratives to be passed on in turn. This is the insight of cultural workers who speak of the need for a "voice," and for making cultural revival the centrepiece of a community's efforts to survive (Favel 143).

Mort Forer may have been aiming for such a message in his portrait of a Métis community, though he fell far short of conveying it. Indeed, the Humback has many parallels with the community in northern Saskatchewan that Campbell describes, including alcohol use and abuse, pitiful gestures of defiance that the men realize are pitiful, control by white people, evasion of welfare officials, girls victimized by men in general and by white men in particular with impunity. Unlike Campbell, Forer does not give (is unable to give) more than an inkling of the soul of the community, the "glimpse of happiness and pride" that Campbell has seen. He is unable to imagine the community producing women like Cheechum or Campbell: his girls do disappear into the city, as did Campbell, but there is no indication that they will have the wherewithal to reach anything but a tragic end. This problem – the inability to imagine a more optimistic ending – may help us understand why Métis characters are often (though not always) doomed in stories by non-Native authors: they are unable to conceive of the sort of internal resources that Campbell brings to bear, either too convinced of the efficacy of Euro-Canadian domination, or too paralyzed with white guilt to imagine breaches in that efficacy.[69]

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[68] The website for the pilgrimage is at http://www.lsap.ca/.

What makes Campbell's bleak narrative bearable are the happy childhood stories and her ability to create hope out of hopelessness. Forer's ending suggests a people with no spirit remaining, doomed to merely reproduce itself physically without any culture to convey that might hold the community together or even strengthen it. Above all, it does not create enough of a psychic connection with the reader to feed the sense of outrage that would lead to a recognition that things must change, if only by creating some sense of pity for the victims. Instead, we end with a feeling of fatalism, which is bound to drain rather than feed a reforming spirit.

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[69] See Perreault for an excellent analysis of the workings of white feminist guilt. On the subject of white guilt in general, see Moses and Goldie xvii.

What is radically new about Campbell's construction of Métis identity is that both narrative and political agency are shifted away from Métis men and into the hands of Métis women. This double shift can be seen by juxtaposing Riel and Campbell as the most outstanding representative writers of Métis identity. As I discussed in Chapter One, Métis men are the actors in Falcon's and Riel's version of the Métis nation. They are the fighters and doers. The role of *la Métisse* is to motivate, witness, and validate that action, and thus to remain on the sidelines of the defining moments of Métis nation-building. Campbell reverses the roles by telling of her father's fruitless attempts at political organization, which leave him "another defeated man" (*Halfbreed* 67) when they fail. Her resistance is aimed not only at white oppression but also at the weaknesses within her own community. No longer willing to remain a passive Métis woman whose lot in life is to persevere after the men are repeatedly defeated, she takes political action into her own hands, drawing on the strengths of her grandmother. A powerful gender link is created between the contemporary Métis woman acceding to discursive agency in order to define Métis identity and experience, and the female ancestors – grandmothers – who are either Indian or strongly identified with their own Indian background, as is Cheechum.

The selective shaping process involved in Campbell's constructed Métis identity is important precisely because *Halfbreed* has been so crucial in the subsequent development of a Métis voice in Canadian literature. As I argue further in Chapter Five, the construction of Métis identity that takes place in Campbell's account has been interpreted as representing a fundamental truth about it, further reinforcing the idea that this identity – as much as any ethnic or national identity – is acquired not only genetically or through the transmission of material practices, but also intertextually, through the transmission of an authoritative identity narrative. Even as Métis writers have gained a prominent voice within Native literature, however, they now face the challenge of a new orthodoxy amongst Native intellectuals according to which the "Indigenous" and "white" worlds are absolutely incommensurable, a categorization that seems calculated once again to deny the possibility of any legitimate position "in-between" the two worlds.

CHAPTER V

MIXED MESSAGES

IN CONTEMPORARY MÉTIS LITERATURE

Native literature has developed rapidly in Canada over the past three decades, and Métis writing has been an important part of that development. What is less often acknowledged in this literature is the possibility that First Nations and Métis authors might have divergent views on the history of Indian/white contact in Canada: for the former, contact has been 400 years of "pain" (Alieoof and Levine 13), while for the latter it has been characterized by some as an enriching experience of having access to "both cultures" with "a special job to fill" (Hope 6). When the need for Native solidarity is felt to outweigh the need to assert Métis difference – or when that difference is blurred by the natural dynamics of métissage, in which identities and group membership are constantly under renegotiation – the tendency for Métis people to adopt the viewpoint of their First Nations kin can result in positions that are uncomfortably close to a denial or rejection of métissage. The authors that I discuss in this chapter include prominent Métis authors – Beatrice Culleton (Métis), Marilyn Dumont (Métis), Sharron Proulx-Turner (Métis), and Gregory Scofield (Métis) – who grapple with the intricacies and conundrums of métissage both in contemporary life and in portrayals of contact history. Two non-Métis authors – Louise Halfe (Plains Cree), and Monique Mojica (Kuna-Rappahanock) – are also discussed in order to add comparative depth to the literary treatment of historical métissage in particular.

Perhaps the most challenging Native development faced by Métis authors is the binaristic approach that posits an opposition and incommensurability between the "Native" or and "white" worlds. According to this model, a fundamental difference exists between Indigenous and European cultures or "worldviews": Acoose states, for example, that "Indigenous peoples' writing primarily grows out of a gynocratic-circular-harmonious way of life while non-Indigenous peoples' writing in Canada has primarily grown out of a Christian-patriarchal hierarchy" ("Post *Halfbreed*" 38). Others hold that the former is holistic, relational, and circular while the latter is atomistic, individualistic and linear. Some Native Studies scholars contend that the two-worlds model developed from the old European "civ/sav" binary and is currently maintained by non-Native authors (Andersen 99). This form of reappropriation of binary structures to assert Native difference is certainly at work in Native literary criticism and may be present in other disciplines as well. It places Métis critics in the difficult position of having to choose to identify with one of the positions on offer, and the choice is usually biased in favour of the Native world view, which is presented as the more healthy and legitimate of the two. At best, Métis intellectuals attempt to assert a liminal position as an ideal capable of somehow reconciling or bridging the two (Akiwenzie-Damm, "Says Who" 17-19). Where the two-worlds model becomes politicized, the natural and accommodating liminality of the Métis position can place them in a precarious position.

As part of the cultural appropriation debate, Native people claim a right of sovereignty over all forms of cultural production, partly on the grounds that non-Native writers are incapable of truly understanding the premises and codes of that production

(DiNova; Monture Angus 24-32; Weaver).[70] Coupled with the positive accent placed on Native culture and the corresponding negative view of Euro-American culture, the idea that there is no possible overlap between the two sides threatens to reactivate the idea of Métis "alienation" that resulted from negative European ideas about miscegenation (Stonequist 140-58). Where any hierarchy is set up, whether a hierarchy of "blood" or of culture, a person whose identity derives from racial and cultural métissage faces challenges in finding a position that is true to himself and that can be accommodated by the other groups to which he is related.

In contemporary Métis texts, two major patterns can be discerned that touch on the shape of Métis identity. First is the examination of relations between the Métis and First Nations, both in terms of sameness – where, for example, shared experiences of racism in society and the effects of oppressive policies and control (or neglect) by white authorities bring the two groups together and build a sense of political solidarity – and of difference, particularly with respect to the question of "blood" and the way in which mixed-bloodedness can be construed as a lack rather than a fullness of identity. The second trend involves the assertion of an enduring Métis culture that may have been muted for several decades and may also have undergone change (just as any culture or identity changes over time), but was never truly "lost."

The Métis renewal currently under way is often explained as arising from the traditional geographic, social, and cultural mobility and adaptability of the Métis people.

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[70] In addition to Monture Angus, several of the critics in Hulan's *Native North America* touch on this subject. See also Rymhs 108-09.

Indeed, flexibility of identity has been seen as one of the qualities that distinguish the Métis from First Nations and Euro-Canadians, a quality that has allowed them to survive adversity. The ability to move between nomadism and settlement or adjust to looser or tighter community bonds over time, with individuals or families moving between groups and adopting identity labels other than "Métis" or "halfbreed" as needed, are ideas that recur in various guises in the historical and sociological literature on the Métis.

A good recent example of this argument is found in Martha Harroun Foster's study of a Métis community in Montana. The book's title states Foster's main claim outright: *We Know Who We Are*, an assertion intended to counter the assumption that racial métissage must amount to some form of alienation or non-identity. Yet as Foster also emphasizes, Métis identity manages to accommodate an enormous degree of flexibility without jeopardizing its survival:

> Métis identity continues to be, as it has always been, flexible, multilayered, multifaceted, and permeable. Formal, publicly recognized identifications such as Chippewa or Cree did not negate a Métis identity. Government and other institutions mandated certain public identities, but they were just one layer that coexisted with a multilayered, situational identity that could survive government, church, or other institutional and popularly ascribed identification. The very *variety* of their kinship bonds supported a Métis identity. In families that might have Cree, Chippewa, or other tribal relatives plus a variety of Euro-American relatives and in-laws, a Métis

> identity might be the only one inclusive enough to encompass and accept all members of the family. (222)

According to Foster, kinship ties are what maintained Métis identity through the difficult years from the late 1890s to the 1970s (United States history paralleling Canadian history in this respect), when it "flowered again" (223). In cultural terms, Métis practices survived even though they may have been labelled "Cree" (as was the case with flower beadwork) or "French." Such practices were therefore still extant and available for recuperation as Métis culture once it became acceptable to identify them as such once again.

As I discussed in the last chapter, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* marks a turning point in the literary treatment of the Métis in Canada, not only because it signals a definitive move toward self-representation but also because Campbell changes the articulation of Métis identity in fundamental ways: where previously it had been based on a male-oriented view of Métis history, at least in literary terms, Campbell presents a powerful picture of a female- and Indian-oriented Métis identity.

By way of comparison, as recently as 1968, Métis poet Adrian Hope wrote an "Ode to the Metis" that exemplifies the male-oriented story of the Métis, in which men are the centre and the main actors in the picture. Telling the history of the Métis, he begins with the "stalwart men of Scotland, France and England" who ventured bravely into the west and "married Indian maidens, [t]he best ones they could find," giving birth to Metis progeny ("or half-breed if you will") who "Had access to both cultures [a]nd a special job to fill." The Métis are "hunters, traders, trappers" (6) who found a new nation that is defeated by "greedy politicians" from Ottawa after a valiant battle in which a few Métis men hold off "the mighty Middleton [a]nd his thousand man army" while "mothers prayed for sons." Riel is "A patriot, a leader" and a true Canadian, and the Métis can now "hold high [their] head[s]" (8) because they are "the true sons of the West" (9).

This poem sums up the received popular history of the Métis people and demonstrates the new heroic view of the Métis that would become accepted in English-Canada just as it had generally been maintained in French. Clearly, Hope's ode does not contain any in-depth characterization of either gender, but the masculine orientation throughout, and the restriction of female figures to Indian "maidens" and praying mothers, conveys the overall characterization of the Métis, prior to the 1970s, as a people whose history and identity were dominated by men. Campbell overturned that characterization by emphasizing that, while Métis men may have fought for the nation in 1870 and 1885, they had been defeated overall: it was Métis women – women who remain more closely tied to their Indian than their European heritage – who had ensured the survival of the community through the difficult years after 1885, and women activists such as Campbell who would work to overcome petty male contests for power within Native politics and make real progress through their roles as community workers.

On a symbolic level, female Native writers and critics began at the same time to overturn stereotypes of Native women as overly sexualized and acquiescent "maidens" or as abject "squaws" and assert that Indigenous women were in fact central to their cultures and acted as equal partners within traditional social, economic and political structures. This new female-oriented accent in First Nations literature found its equivalent in a new focus on women's studies in Métis history and ethnography, where historians such as Sylvia Van Kirk, Jennifer Brown, and Jacqueline Peterson turned their attention to the important roles played by women in Métis ethnogenesis and culture. In a 1983 article, for example, Brown suggested that Métis women in the fur trade were the "centre and symbol" of Métis communities ("Woman" 39) because they were more likely to stay in Western Canada than their brothers, who might go to Montreal to be educated or as part of their fur trade employment. Métis women therefore formed the steady core of a Métis community that the more mobile and potentially Euro-oriented Métis males could return to, thereby reinforcing their own Métis identities.

Nevertheless, the assumption that maintenance of a stable community and identity is the ultimate value for any ethnic group – an assumption that is often couched in terms of resistance to cultural genocide against First Nations peoples – can also be problematic for the Métis. If the ideal for First Nations groups themselves is to maintain community and culture, then the process of Métis ethnogenesis can be seen to represent a certain threat. It is at this point – the very point of contact – that genocide discourse as applied to First Nations history becomes problematical. What I call "genocide discourse" is the set of assumptions, often expressed in Native resistance writing, which assumes and asserts that contact amounted to a process of physical and cultural genocide against First Nations peoples, whether or not that process was a matter of policy or a side effect of colonial domination by Euro-Canadians.

In her study of mixed-blood urban Native people, for example, Bonita Lawrence tells us that "the continuous recurrence of histories of oppression and repression gradually began to form a metanarrative about encounters with genocide," a metanarrative that becomes "the underlying premise shaping [Lawrence's] book" (xvii). Citing discussions of the United Nations Genocide Convention, she offers the definition of genocide as "a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves" and says that "no other perspective encompassed the realities of the stories told to me" (xviii).

Long before Lawrence published her study, it had become common practice to refer to genocide in discussing Native realities, as does Janice Acoose when she states that it was Indigenous peoples' relationship to the land that allowed them to survive "despite many very deliberate genocidal attempts to do away with our cultures" ("Revisiting" 139). While residential schools and government policies outlawing traditional Aboriginal practices are most often referred to as genocidal, Acoose also includes policy applied to the Métis, in that "the land was taken from us unjustly (some even say illegally) through the scrip system" (150, n. 1). Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm says that genocide is part of the "political realities" that surround her: "Realities like racism, imperialism, colonization, genocide. These are part of the daily reality of being an Indigenous person in a society that has spent more than 500 years trying to kill you one way or another." Historically, says Akiwenzie-Damm, "genocide has always been at the forefront of the colonial agenda" in Canada and elsewhere, but "the decimation of Indigenous peoples here on Turtle Island and around the world is a holocaust that remains completely unacknowledged" ("We Belong" 23).

Genocide discourse can be seen as the contemporary counterpart of what Patrick Brantlinger calls "extinction discourse" (1), which dominated European views of Indians from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The familiar trope of the "dead and dying" Indian is the literary manifestation of extinction discourse, which posited "the inevitable disappearance of some or all primitive races" (1). In literary critical terms, it is precisely this trope that genocide discourse turns against white-authored texts, charging them with providing ideological camouflage for destructive policies by portraying Native genocide as a "natural" outcome of contact. The same criticism is used against apparently sympathetic authors such as Laurence and Wiebe because they "kill off" their Native characters (or, in Wiebe's case, takes as the climax of his narratives the deaths of historical characters such as Big Bear and Louis Riel). The assumption in terms of genocide discourse is that these authors still convey, under cover of a sympathetic presentation, the same old view of Native people as victims who are trapped in moribund cultures and beyond saving. As I argue at the end of this chapter, however, genocide discourse does not necessarily provide the same sort of affirmative power for Métis people that it may offer First Nations people. Nevertheless, Métis authors seem for the time being to have taken up the position that contact history should be properly characterized as five hundred years of "pain" (LaRocque, "Native Writers" 71), no matter how negative the implications may be for their own history.[71] Before proceeding to a discussion of how Métis authors deal with themes such as Métis liminality and genocide discourse, I will first address the apparently self-contradictory issue of whether "Métis literature" actually exists.

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[71] LaRocque is echoing and affirming the words of Abenaki author Alanis Obomsawin; the phrase also echoes Akiwenzie-Damm's characterization of contact history as "a 500-year-long nightmare" ("We Belong" 23).

The Impossibility of "Métis" Literature

It seems counterintuitive to declare, after discussing Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* as a seminal text of both Native and Métis literature, that the idea of "Métis literature" is itself untenable. Yet that is the situation that I now face as I attempt to follow the thread of how Métis themes have been developed in texts by and about Métis authors in the years since *Halfbreed* was published. There are a number of reasons why a critic attempting to delineate what makes a text a "Métis" text might suppose that such a definition is *possible* and a number of reasons why, in actuality, it ends up being an impossible task. Once having substantiated my claim that Métis literature is impossible, however, I will nonetheless continue to discuss what I feel are particular Métis themes in texts written by Métis and First Nations authors. In particular, I discuss the current tendency to conflate Métis and Indian people, often under the designation "Native," but also as "First Nations," a term that, as I have already amply pointed out, does not properly apply to Métis people, because as it is currently used in Canada, "First Nations" refers to aboriginal peoples that existed here before the arrival of Europeans.[72]

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[72] Emma LaRocque contends that the use of "First Nations" to exclude the Métis from discussions of Aboriginal issues is a deliberate tactic used by the provincial and federal governments because "the further removed the Métis are from their Aboriginality, the less pressure [there is] for governments to address

Tedious as it may seem to split hairs about terminology, the fact remains that naming practices have enormous resonance in Canada, and having the power to name themselves is crucial to Native people in establishing cultural and political sovereignty and asserting claims for recognition on their own terms. The use of the word "Métis" as distinct from "Indian" (historically) or "First Nations" (today) reflects the fact that the Métis people of the nineteenth century had an identity and culture that they felt was distinct from those of neighbouring peoples whose names they might have adopted. As Nicole St. Onge has determined in discussing the Cree-speaking Métis of St. Laurent, Manitoba (who live on the shores of Lake Manitoba), even though they lived next to a Saulteaux village and maintained a lifestyle closer to that of the lake-fishing Saulteaux than to that of Métis buffalo hunters, traders and carters of Red River, they nevertheless continued to think of themselves as "Métis" rather than Saulteaux (31-32).

Having been virtually lost by the mid-twentieth century (except in texts about history), the term "Métis" was revived in the 1970s as an acceptable name for people who had previously called themselves either "halfbreed" or "Métis" (amongst French-speaking people). Howard Adams feels that "Métis" is a "polite term" (ix) that was being used to hide the racist attitudes toward his people that were summed up by the derogatory word "halfbreed." Nevertheless, it might be argued that the establishment of a culturally

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Metis land and resource claims" ("Native Identity" 393). Yet Hulan also points out, citing the discussion at a CACLALS round table in 2000, that "Native literature" is a category that "may have outlived its usefulness. The argument that this category is too broad to account for the specificity of cultural experience extends the call for attention to the history of politics of individual groups" ("Cultural" 89, n. 4). The result is a tendency to refer merely to "First Nations literature," as Hulan and Warley do in a 1999 article acceptable name for this group was a fundamental prerequisite for the recognition of the Métis as Aboriginal people under the 1982 Constitution Act.

That political recognition provided an important impetus for the social, political and cultural revival of the Métis, in turn feeding the process of ethnic rediscovery. In literature, however, the picture has been rather different. The tendency in writing by Métis authors, as by First Nations authors in general, has been to focus on the post-1885 history of colonial oppression and the ways in which it has damaged Métis communities and individuals, rather than on the early history of the Métis people. Because oppression and racism affected the Métis and First Nations in similar ways (for example, by relegating them to the position of an economic underclass and depriving them of power and agency, resulting in problems of alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, and criminalization as a result of low self-esteem in individuals and the breakdown of family and community bonds), these shared themes are naturally found in Métis and First Nations texts alike.

The problem is that, although critics sometimes make such distinctions as referring to "Native and Métis" writers (Bowerbank and Wawia 565), they do not do so as a result of perceived differences in the themes or contexts of the texts themselves. Instead, the only perceptible reason for making this distinction is the ethnic identity of the writers. Critical assumptions, by and large, are based on a presumed *sameness* of "Native" (or "First Nations") and Métis experiences. In her discussion of Marilyn

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("Cultural Literacy 59) and as is done in the *Enclycopedia of Literature in Canada* (published in 2002), with no entry for Métis literature.

Dumont's poetry, for example, Brenda Payne characterizes Dumont as revelling in "her identity as a Metis woman" (135) and writing from "her experience of growing up as a Metis woman in a White, patriarchal society" (139), but later broadens the term to state that "Dumont has experienced the treatment and history of Native women throughout her life" (141), thus imperceptibly sliding into a discussion that assumes a certain sameness of experiences for all Native (i.e., Métis and First Nations) people. Payne's apparently natural shift in perspective, a shift that is not uncommon in criticism of Native literature, demonstrates why the conflation of Métis and First Nations, often performed simply by encompassing both with the word "Native," can sometimes lead to an inaccurate conflation of colonial experiences, as is the case with residential schools. The assumption that the Métis school experience was identical to that of First Nations seems calculated to reinforce the sense of solidarity and grievance shared by those two groups, even as it obscures the fact that the Métis experience involved its own particular forms of deprivation and mistreatment.

In fact, most Métis people did not attend residential school. In his monumental history of residential schools, J.R. Miller notes that the original recommendations on residential schools made to the government in 1879 included the recruitment of Métis students and instructors because they were "natural mediator[s]" between whites and Indians (Nicholas Flood Davin qtd. in Miller 101). When the policy was implemented, however, "no reference was made to recruiting Métis students or employing Métis staff, as Davin had so emphatically recommended. Although some Métis and non-status Indian children were quietly admitted in the early years of the new residential system, by the

1890s Ottawa was insisting that it would provide grants only for the children of status Indians, for whom the federal government had constitutional responsibility" (103-04). The problem for Métis was not so much the devastation of being removed to residential schools as the difficulty of receiving any education at all. Some children were able to attend residential schools sporadically when spaces were available and the administration was willing to receive them; attendance at local schools often depended on the charity of white communities, since Métis who were squatters on Crown lands did not pay the taxes that would entitle them to send their children to school (Sealey, "Education" 23-24; Campbell in Lutz 51).

Without belabouring the subject, Campbell does indicate this specifically Métis context for her experience at school when she notes that her grandmother had made special arrangements for her to attend a residential school in Grade One. Once a local school is built, Campbell attends that school (*Halfbreed* 44-45) together with local white children: her experience of racist (and classist) taunting, and of developing feelings of self-hatred by comparing her lunches with those of the white children, might therefore be called typically "Métis" experiences, at least prior to the closing of residential schools.

Similarly, speaking Michif (the language that both Campbell and Laurence's narrator describe as a mix of French and Cree) along with one or more Aboriginal languages is a typical feature of Métis culture, but one that is often ignored by critics, who view Aboriginal languages as a more authentic marker of the Indian component of the Métis.[73] The situation is not helped by the fact that the most visible Michif-based text we have is Campbell's translation into "village English" of stories told in Michif by Métis elders (in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*). That is, it is difficult to use a minority language as a basis for a culture that is no longer carried on in that language.

The traditional Catholicism of the early Métis people has now been reinterpreted (not necessarily in the communities themselves, but in literature and criticism) as a particularly noxious aspect of cultural genocide, as though learning Christianity at a parent's knee were just as violent and morally objectionable as being baptized by a fervent priest after cursory "instruction" in his foreign religion, or being indoctrinated into Christianity by being separated from one's family, forced not to speak one's own language, and given religious instruction every day under threat of atrocious physical and psychological punishment. Of course, one would not be willing to say that a Métis school experience that results in devastating self-hatred is any less oppressive than a residential school experience involving psychological, physical or sexual abuse. Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge about the historical context of Métis people, together with the gradual development of a certain "sameness" of experiences in contemporary society, combine to create a situation in which it is difficult to say what a "Métis" text consists of, much less how it should be read (further compounding what Helen Hoy has identified as a basic issue for non-Native readers of Native texts in general, the question of "how to read" those texts from outside Native cultures (3-31).

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[73] The most notable exception is Pamela Sing, who has studied the "textual production of Michif voices" as "cultural weaponry" in the development of a contemporary Métis literary tradition based on French-Métis heritage ("Intersections" 95).

By way of illustrating both problems – first identifying and then interpreting Métis texts – it is constructive to consider Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), a novel that has frequently been studied alongside *Halfbreed* as a foundational Métis text. The following synopsis by Dawn Thompson represents a standard manner of presenting the plot, including the insistence on the girls' "Métis heritage":

> *In Search of April Raintree* chronicles the life of a young Metis woman and her sister, Cheryl, who are taken from their alcoholic parents at a young age and put in separate foster homes. [...] [B]ecause they have different physical characteristics and live in different environments, their attitudes towards their origins diverge. Cheryl, who is dark skinned, learns to take pride in her Metis heritage, and as a young adult devotes herself to helping her people. April, whose skin is light enough to pass for white, and who is abused by members of her racist foster family, rejects her Native side. She marries into a wealthy white family, and the sisters grow apart. Racism eventually takes its toll on April's marriage, and she divorces her husband and returns to her native Winnipeg. She finds Cheryl there, all but defeated by the oppression surrounding her and following in her parents' footsteps. While attempting to help Cheryl change her life, April is mistaken for her sister and raped. The novel concludes with Cheryl's suicide; she leaves April her diary [...] and her young son. Together, the

> child and her sister's words help April to find acceptance of, and pride in, her Metis heritage. (62)

This summary accords with Culleton's own characterization of the novel as "Métis" when she tells us, echoing Campbell's introduction to *Halfbreed*, that "*In Search of April Raintree* allows non-Native people to feel what it's like to be a Métis" ("Special" 249). Culleton adds that other readers (presumably Native readers) have told her that the book is an accurate reflection of their own experience (249).

The problem is that, apart from the author's ethnic identity and the motif of the dark-skinned and light-skinned sisters, there is virtually nothing in the novel that tells us about a specifically Métis reality or worldview. The novel has been interpreted within a sort of general Native context in which all of the themes and events in the novel, including the parents' ill health and "self-medicating" alcoholism, the children's removal from family and culture, racist treatment, development of self-hatred, rape and suicide, might apply to any Native person anywhere in the country. In attempting to "contextualize" the story, authors tend to conflate Métis and First Nations experience entirely and throughout the whole of contact history. Here is a representative account by Michael Creal of what many critics would consider the relevant background:

> These problems are the product of a long history: white settlement and conquest, nineteenth century treaty arrangements between the First Nations and the British Crown [...], the missionary work of the churches, the Indian Act of 1876, and the residential school system. The overall effect of that history has been deeply destructive of the cultures of First Nations. "Indian

> Reservations" might have seemed a reasonable arrangement in the last century, but some visitors to Canada from other continents have been struck by its similarity to South Africa's notorious system of *apartheid.* (251)

As a set-up for a novel by a First Nations author dealing with residential school or the perverse effects of the Indian Act, such a paragraph would be entirely appropriate. In providing the background for a Métis novel, it is simply wrong: most self-identified Métis were not part of the treaty process, except as interpreters, and certainly did not receive reserve land or live on reserves;[74] the Métis were not on the same footing as Indian peoples with the missionaries, who were not "converting" them, but were providing valued religious instruction and community support for a religion inherited from their French-Canadian ancestors; Métis people did not come under the Indian Act (particularly since in 1876, the Métis were not considered and did not consider themselves "Indian," although they generally recognized their kinship with Indians); and finally, as mentioned above, most Métis did not attend residential schools.

While Creal's interpretation of the novel itself holds together as a discussion of pan-Native experience in the twentieth century, this presentation of the context that he believes to be pertinent to the novel indicates a disturbing willingness to overlook the specificity of the meaning of "Métis." Nonetheless, Creal might be forgiven for this misinterpretation, given that, as Emma LaRocque tells us, the novel is not actually Métis, at least as she understands the word:

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[74] Teillet notes that Métis adhesion to Treaty Three in the Rainy Lake region of Ontario was the only case in which Métis people were admitted to treaty and given reserve lands *as* Métis rather than as people who had re-identified as Indians, which was not uncommon (59).

> Most critics have assumed the sisters are "Métis." But are they? They may be "métis" or "halfbreed," that is, they may have part Indian and part White ancestry, but they quite clearly do not have Red River Cree-Métis cultural identity. Anyone looking for such cultural markers will not find them in this novel, not even towards the end where April begins to accept her Indianness (which is not the same as Métisness). ("Teaching" 222-23)

April Raintree expresses that acceptance by referring to "my people" (207), a nebulous notion that is more likely referring to "Native" people in general than to Métis people in particular. References in the novel to Cheryl Raintree attending powwows and helping "her people," that is, the community she becomes part of through a Native Friendship Centre, similarly suggest that it is not a "Métis heritage" but a contemporary pan-Native identity that April is poised to rediscover at the end of the novel.

Given the identification of the girls as Métis within the novel itself and by the author, it is not surprising that critics would use that term in their texts. In attempting to correct the mistaken ideas about the Métis that are perpetuated by the fuzzy or inaccurate contextualizing of Métisness, however, LaRocque herself makes the singularly inaccurate charge that non-Métis critics are solely to blame for the inaccuracies:

> I have found it troublesome that non-Métis critics use Culleton's novel as a standard of defining the Métis. Culleton's portrayal (and experience) is valid for herself and her identity search, but the novel should not be used

> as a history book or cultural lesson on the Red River Cree-Métis. There is no question that the Raintree sisters experience racism and misogyny to the extreme, but I cannot say that they represent my culture. ("Teaching" 223)

Over the past two decades, there have been insistent calls from Native critics that they should take the lead in interpreting texts by Native authors, and many non-Native critics now concur. With the enormous body of literary criticism that now exists both north and south of the border, there is no excuse for excluding Native critical perspectives on Native texts (although there is also no apparent reason to exclude the views of non-Native critics whose work is done with integrity, respect and insight). Given the number of Métis critics who have discussed *In Search of April Raintree* as a "Métis" text (including Jodi Lundgren, Janice Acoose (Saulteaux/Métis) and Jo-Ann Thom), a non-Native critic might well decide that it is not only advisable, given the author's Métis identity, but also *obligatory* to follow suit in their own discussions of the novel.

On the whole, since I am focusing on Western Métis and most notably those who trace their roots to the Red River community, I would be happy to take guidance from LaRocque on the Métis worldview as she knows it. However, she merely informs us that "As a Cree-Métis of Red River roots, I grew up with an Indigenous worldview and experience that come only from the land and the language" ("Teaching" 223), without providing further detail. She insists that Métis culture is unique and unified, not borrowed or dispersed: "Our traditions and cultural expressions remain uniquely Metis. Our legends and ghost stories, our Cree chants or Red River jigs, our humour and temperament, the embroidery on our moccasins or pillowcases, as well as our protocols for familial and social behaviour, remain distinctly Metis" ("Native Identity" 392). Still, LaRocque acknowledges that Métis with different community backgrounds must necessarily have different worldviews: "A Metis who grew up speaking French Michif with a Roman Catholic religion in an urban area is different from a Metis who grew up speaking Cree Michif with an Aboriginal epistemology in a bush or rural setting" (394). In short, one might make the same statement about LaRocque's version of Métisness that she does about Culleton's, that it is "valid for herself" and her community, but that there are many other Métis communities across the country whose versions of Métis culture are as different from LaRocque's as LaRocque's is from Culleton's.

Any critic who reads enough literary texts by authors identified as "Métis" (sometimes without other information about family, community, or regional background) and criticism about "Métis" topics that are in fact pan-Native or "Indian" will inevitably reach the same sort of impasse to which the above discussion leads: there are so many meanings of "Métis" today (presumably indicating that the word has proven enormously useful in filling a huge "identity" vacuum over the past four decades) that there can be no defining what "Métis literature" really means.

I believe that the root of the problem lies not with non-Native critics who do not know any better, but in the very pattern of Métis history I have outlined throughout this study, in which the idea of being "Métis" was lost or suppressed – the phrase used is usually "forgotten" – over the course of half a century. There is no reason that the Raintree family, who come from Norway House in Northern Manitoba, might not have been part of the Métis diasporas that followed 1870 and 1885, pushed (or retreating) from the southern plains into the northern bush to continue a traditional lifestyle of hunting, trapping and fishing. The fact that they have "lost" their traditional Métis culture (all the more so after the move to Winnipeg and the girls' removal from their parents, since toddlers can hardly be expected to maintain a Métis identity and the culture they were born into without continued immersion in that culture) is indeed part of the current reality of many Métis people, including those with roots in Red River.

What LaRocque is objecting to, I believe, is the implication that the portrait of misogyny and violence suffered by the Raintree girls somehow characterizes Métis culture as a whole. Furthermore, the presumption that April Raintree returns to her "Métis heritage" at the end of the novel, merely because she was born Métis, is false: attending powwows (as Cheryl had done) may be an excellent way of returning to the Native world more generally, but it does not constitute a specifically Métis legacy. Just as Campbell reconstructs Métisness through the indigenized model of her Cheechum, so does Culleton suggest (without the concrete image of an Indigenous female ancestor) that a Métis identity can be reconstructed merely by reconnecting with some form of "Indianness."

LaRocque indicates that the only way to delineate aspects of a text that might signal its inclusion in the "Red River Métis" category is by identifying appropriate "cultural markers" ("Teaching" 223) within the text. It is precisely this approach that Pamela Sing takes in studies in which she identifies the use of Michif words and phrases (in "Production") or analyzes the use of bannock as a symbol in Métis texts (in "Une 'nouvelle' tradition"). Still, the problem of purportedly "Métis" texts that are actually describing Indian or contemporary (general) Native experiences or cultures is likely to continue to bedevil the field of Native literature in Canada for some time to come, at least until more specific awareness has developed of the distinctive nature of Métis history and culture.

Contemporary Métis Images

Before I turn to the issue of how historical métissage is represented by Métis authors today, I wish to examine some of the ways in which their texts project the current state of Métis identity. An outstanding example of a personal and relatively unpoliticized expression of Métis identity is found in Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Metis Women* (1999), a collection of poetry that is a tribute to his mother, Dorothy Scofield, and his "aunt" Georgina Houle Young, a neighbour, friend, and mentor. Although the volume is presented as a tribute to the two women, the inclusion of the identifier "Metis" in the title draws our attention to the fact that the author wants to emphasize ways in which the women he is celebrating exemplify that ethnicity. Lines from Wilf Carter and Hank Snow are featured alongside Cree expressions, sewing moccasins and "clomp[ing] down the street" (59) in cowboy boots are equally important parts of Dorothy Scofield's life, and the struggles of living in poverty are insignificant beside the fact that

> ... love was always
> at her fingertips,
> spreading scatter-rugs, doilies
>
> and music to grow up on,

> so the story came to life,
>
> a life I wouldn't change. (66)

Even though a thread of pain runs through the volume (most particularly the pain of sexual violation inflicted on women and children), Scofield takes care to make the point, as he does in the lines above, that the lives he is writing about are not defined by pain, but by love.

In his autobiography, *Thunder through My Veins*, which was published in the same year, Scofield reveals that he was unaware or uncertain of his own Métis identity because he was separated from his mother after the age of five as she struggled with alcoholism and ill health. Raised in foster homes, Scofield was unsure of how to "be" Métis until he became an adult, reconnected with his mother, and met Houle Young, who acted as the conduit for his own ethnic rediscovery. It is important to note, however, that Scofield at first wished to identify as Cree because of persistent negative images of the Métis. In that sense, Scofield reaches "acceptance of his Métis heritage" (Scudeler 129) from the Indian instead of the white side, projecting a mirror image of April Raintree's experience, except that Scofield clearly feels that there is a distinction between being Cree and being Métis, a distinction that is not made in Culleton's novel.

Scofield's mother and aunt represent the double pattern of contemporary Métis experience: the "loss" of identity owing to the strains of alcohol abuse, relocation away from a Métis community, and placement in non-Métis foster care, and the re-establishment of what has become a link to his Métis background thanks to a woman elder who helps the young man make the connection with a tenuous, yet precious, identity. By emphasizing the Métis identity of the women in the title of his volume of poetry, Scofield is emphasizing his own Métisness, a heritage that he had virtually lost by the time he was a young adult.

The scenes of personal life that Scofield evokes, and the way in which he weaves Métis accents into the fabric of that life, help his readers understand how much he cherishes the small details that mark the two women's Métisness. In "Heart Food," Scofield writes that "Pine-Sol is the smell of [a] home" in which "handmade curtains trimmed with lace warmed winter windows" (15) and where there is "baking bread, loaves fat and soft," "stewing moose meat" and "mugs of hot tea heaped with sugar, evaporated milk" (15). The aura of house-proud care, where material details – handmade curtains, baking and cooking – speak of a nurturing maternal presence, evokes a childhood full of caring and comfort. These memories constitute the "heart food" that continues to nourish the individual in later life.

The reference to moose-meat stew is the first detail that really differentiates this homey picture from any Euro-Canadian household. The picture differs even further when we read that the table is "strewn with glass beads, flower templates and moccasin tongues, scraps of smoked moose hide tanned out back of Caroline's place and sent from Alberta" (15). This switch to a still-life of moccasin-making materials might suggest that we have moved into an area of "Indianness," yet the reference to the flower pattern and the description later of dolls who "[jig] on the shelf to fiddle tunes" (16) are specific indicators of Métis culture. Métis cultural markers of this kind are precisely the sort of detail that signals what LaRocque might see as an "authentic" Métis text.

Scofield's description of Métis lifeways as a combination of Euro-Canadian and Indian elements tells us that, at least domestically, being Métis is as "normal" as either of those other options. There is no sense of discordance, hypocrisy, or falseness in the set of details that Scofield depicts as making up a life that is presumed to be whole, not partial or lacking. Unlike the political contexts in which Métis people assert their identity in political or educational forums, in the private realm of the home, the poem tells us, there is no need to prove or negotiate anything. Scofield makes an important statement by conveying a sense of the rightness, comfort, and restfulness of being Métis far from the contentious field of politics, the sort of self-evident existence that many Canadians take for granted in their public lives as well, but something that the Métis have only recently been able to enjoy in the form of public festivals or participation in national events.[75]

This poem can be compared to Marilyn Dumont's "The White Judges," from her collection *A Really Good Brown Girl* (1996). Here, the family home is rather more run-down, an "old schoolhouse, one large room that my father converted into two storeys with a plank staircase leading to the second floor" with "worn linoleum and scatter rugs" on the floor (11). Here too, the family sits down to a meal of "moose stew, bannock and tea," yet the scene that should be one of nourishment and contentment (both physical and spiritual) is instead one of anxiety, because as the Métis family "stare[s] down" its non-normative meal, "outside the white judges sat encircling our house" (11). Similarly, the white judges "wai[t] to judge" as the family enjoys a meal of tripe, tries on second-hand clothes from boxes dropped anonymously outside the door, or butchers poached game by the light of truck headlights.[76]

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[75] An example of such participation occurred recently, for example, when a young Métis fiddler played a Métis dirge at Canada's Vimy monument in France during the ceremonies marking the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

The "judge" figures represent the infiltrated consciousness that, once it has become part of a subaltern psyche, can never be escaped, even in the most private of spaces or activities. It is precisely this force, the mental adoption of hegemonic norms and judging oneself according to those norms, that represents the greatest threat to the integrity of Métis identity. By personifying these forces as "white judges," Dumont helps us understand the sort of inexorable, silently threatening power that they can continue to exert far from the usual sites of white power (in this case, the courtroom). By metaphorically projecting the image of external forces as a ghostly presence external to the individuals over whom they hold sway, however, she also suggests that they can be battled, if only their presence can first be recognized.

Scofield, too, tells a very different story about Métis resistance to white domination in his autobiography. Clearly, he wishes to present portraits of his mother and aunt that are as enabling and positive as possible – portraits inspired by his love for these women. In his autobiography, however, we learn that Scofield's mother led a life that belies the picture of relative stability and contentment projected by the poems. He writes of his suspicions that his mother may have been involved in prostitution when she was a young woman (2), and links her lack of overt Métis identity back through previous generations: "I often wonder if the secrecy of Mom's life, even my own, began with the shame my grandfather carried throughout his life for being Métis. Perhaps it goes back even farther, back to his mother, my great-grandmother. It's painful to think that three generations – all of whom died before they were sixty – grew up in a world of half-truths and broken blood ties" (6). Scofield's assertion of a Métis identity for his mother is thus actually a restitution of an identity that she was unable to actualize during her lifetime. In this way, he lays claim to maternal and ethnic bonds with the same gesture. Becoming Métis is, for Scofield, a means of becoming whole and beginning to feel comfortable with himself.[77]

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[76] It was not until 2003, with the Supreme Court decision in *R. v. Powley*, [2003] 2 S.C.R. 207, 2003 SCC 43, that the Métis' traditional right to hunt on Crown land in all seasons was upheld (Teillet 56-57).

Scofield's need to find an identity anchor outside of an impersonal urban context is understandable, given that he is contending with the rough context of skid row and its constant barrage of poverty, homelessness, crime, prostitution, alcohol and drugs. Even in middle class Canada, however, the compulsion to reconnect with a lost Métis identity is strong. This was the story that Christine Welsh told in 1991. In a more recent film that covers some of the same ideas and emotions, Merelda Fiddler tells of her journey of ethnic rediscovery. Although Métis history is used in *Fiddler's Map* (2003) as a way of setting the stage for Fiddler's personal story, her main concern is how a young person who has been separated from her Métis background can find a way back to it.

Unlike Welsh, Fiddler does not seek to politicize the history of her female ancestors, nor is hers a story of uncovering a hidden ethnic identity. Instead, the reason for her "loss" of Métis identity is an ordinary story of divorce: her Métis father and Euro-Canadian mother divorced when Fiddler was young. Blonde and blue-eyed, she did not face the same sort of racist consciousness-raising that Welsh encountered in school. All of these differences make Fiddler's story more "neutral" in that she does not seek to know why this identity option was removed from her, but merely how to redress what she feels as a lack in herself.

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[77] Apart from his journey to a reintegrated Métis identity, Scofield also contends in his autobiography with his struggle to become comfortable with his homosexuality (Scudeler 134-40).

It is no overstatement to say that Fiddler perceives her Euro-Canadian identity as a lack: she tells us that as a young woman entering university, she began to realize that she felt "empty" (*Fiddler's*). Certainly, such a sentiment could be the expression of a young woman who feels the lack of a father in her life, and the search for her Métis roots could be the displaced search for a connection with her absent father. Still, it is significant that the unmarked or normative Euro-Canadian identity is seen as a sort of blank space, whereas true "identity" comes with a marked, minority ethnicity. As Fiddler discovers in the process of talking to Métis cultural workers, relatives, and elders, however, reconnecting is not as easy as many suppose. Learning about Métis history and how to make bannock, going out on a trapline with a friend, or attending a community dance with fiddle music and jigging are all ways of experiencing Métis culture. Nevertheless, as Fiddler sits over tea and bannock with a long-lost Métis cousin, she wonders in a melancholy tone "whether you can reclaim your identity if you have walked away from it or just not had it there. Is that something that is open to me?" Her cousin replies confidently that "you can reclaim your identity anytime you want" (*Fiddler's*), but Fiddler's question lingers throughout the film. In contrast with Welsh's approach, Fiddler's treatment of Métisness in terms of contemporary ethnic identity rather than as a problem of historical métissage emphasizes culture over race and thereby avoids the potential negativity of a race- or blood-based Métis identity, which seems inevitably to lead to the conundrum of racial mixing as an unsolvable problem rather than as a common feature of human societies.

The theme of Métis racial liminality has often been used in creating images of Métis in Euro-Canadian texts, as I discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Racial liminality is a tricky idea in that it can cut both ways: in a context of racial hierarchization, mixed race can be deemed either a sign of the degradation of the "superior" race or a sign of improvement of the "inferior" one. While the move away from race theory and toward cultural theory in the twentieth century was seen by many as a way of transcending race thinking, the idea of race has in fact been emphasized in recent years, this time by critics of the mantra of multiculturalism as camouflage for the same structural problems that used to be openly attributed to racial prejudice. Some Métis writers seem to be aware that focusing on liminality raises the spectre of "alienation" as an inherent trait of Métisness (Episkenew 58; LaRocque "Native Writers" 273-74). The idea that the Métis lack a cultural centre is one that many Métis now work to dispel, emphasizing instead that they "know who they are."

There is no denying, however, that Métis people, even those derived from Red River, have a range of backgrounds and life experiences. That being the case, it is difficult to pinpoint what might constitute a singular Métis identity in terms of culture or even history. For that reason, mixedbloodedness itself can easily become the common denominator that is used to distinguish Métis people in general. Indeed, some Métis commentators insist that race is central to their own identities: "Ideas about race have always stood firmly at the centre of everything that I have known about being different," says Carole Leclair ("Memory Alive" 165). She feels hurt by the notion that race is "just a construct" because that seems to be a denial that "being a mixed-blood person has any 'real' bodily effect or relevance in human experience" (166). Yet the contention that ethnic identity is fundamentally contained "in the blood" leads back to the same conundrum that white authors were trying to avoid when they turned away from biology and toward culture as the fundamental indicator of identity. By asserting the centrality of blood ties as constitutive of some core of the individual, a core that can be reactivated even when a culture has been "broken" or suppressed, First Nations and Métis ethnic rediscovers are reasserting a potentially dangerous biology-based race thinking that contains pitfalls for the Métis in particular.

Anti-racist thought, which aims to invalidate the old hierarchy according to which Indians were considered inferior to whites, is an important part of First Nations resistance to neo-colonialism. At best, such resistance should dismantle the notion of race and racial hierarchies altogether. In practice, however, there are important ways in which race remains a fundamental part of First Nations identity and claims to land and sovereignty. Clearly, when those claims or identity are felt to be strengthened by the assertion of "pure" bloodedness, there is a danger of setting up, in reverse, the same sort of racial hierarchy that has been discredited when it was used to bolster domination by white people.

In the poem "Leather and Naughahyde," Marilyn Dumont creates a scene in which precisely this sort of thinking comes into play. Using the style of an everyday anecdote, the speaker tells of having coffee with "this treaty guy from up north" (*Really Good* 58) where both "treaty" status and the fact that he is from the "north" are indicators that this is someone who has access to what many deem a more authentic reserve- and bush-based lifestyle. The two are able to understand each other as long as they are laughing at "how crazy 'the mooniyaw' [white people] are in the city" (58). That changes when the discussion turns away from the common "enemy" and to the question of Native identity. Here, Dumont instructs her reader on the delicacy of this question between Native people. It is not broached directly, but in an "oblique way" so as "to find out someone's status without actually asking." Clearly already versed in the politics of Native identity, the speaker tells the man she is Métis "like it's an apology." The description of the man's reaction makes up the remainder of the poem. Making explicit the blood-based assessment that is under way, Dumont uses a biological simile to sum up the man's attitude: he seems to accept her apology for being Métis, "like he's got a big heart and mine's pumping diluted blood" (58). The notion that one's blood could be "diluted" conveys precisely the sense of lack that is part of all race-based ideologies in which mixed blood is considered a taint, stain, or some form of "less-than."

The man's feigned acceptance is followed by retreat, after which he signals that the relationship between the two has changed forever, with a look "that says he's leather and I'm naughahyde" (58). The "skin"[78] metaphor is the external marker of blood quantum: Dumont's use of the humorous word "naughahyde" implicitly pokes fun at the very notion that a person's outer covering says anything significant about her, or that she might be evaluated like a piece of furniture. Most tellingly, the sense of solidarity promised at the beginning of the poem has been shattered by the end with the establishment of a racial hierarchy, with the Métis individual in the inferior position. Just as with the "white judges," except now in an Indian context, the Métis woman feels judged for some inherent failing, this one biological instead of cultural. Although her apologetic attitude about being Métis is not activated until the subject of Native identity comes up, the fact that the narrator is already apologetic, even before seeing the Indian man's reaction, indicates that she anticipates, and to some extent accepts, the sort of judgment that she knows will follow: accepting the anticipated denigration of the other is the hallmark of infiltrated consciousness.

Unfortunately, the current forms of Native self-assertion in literary criticism do not lend themselves to addressing the problems of Métis who feel caught between the judgments of whites and Indians. Indeed, some of the terms currently used in reaffirming Native identity and community in general have the perverse effect of undermining Métis identity in particular. Even a critic such as Gail Valaskakis, for example, who seems to understand the dead end into which racial thinking can lead, is tripped up by the apparently unobjectionable aim of affirming "Indian identity." In her chapter entitled

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[78] The glossary to Scofield's *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel* notes that "skin" is "a term first introduced by the American Indian Movement to describe native heritage or nativeness" (91).

"Blood Borders," Valaskakis thoroughly examines the issues of blood and identity in Native politics. As they struggle to transcend persistent ideas of blood-based identity, says Valaskakis, Native communities are affirming "that Indian identity emerges in the prism of contingent lived relations that are interwoven into heredity, community, and culture." She concludes that "In the end, Indian identity and recognition are constructed, expressed, and negotiated in the continuity and contingency of All My Relations" (253), a conclusion that would seem to accept métissage as an important part of the negotiation of identities.

Yet Valaskakis cannot seem to help contradicting herself. She criticizes female anthropologists for erroneously imitating their male counterparts in that "they studied the structure and function of Indian culture and neglected the social meaning of hybrid identity and power relations built into the conflicting representations, interactions, and alliances Indian women experienced" (141). Even in her discussion of fur trade history, though, Valaskakis erases Métis women by continuing to refer to "Indian" women when referring to the arrival of white women in the West in the mid-nineteenth century – at a point where most traders' Native wives were in fact Métis, not Indian – as though their subject positions had remained entirely unchanged by the experience of marrying white (or Métis) men, working in the fur trade, and living in Métis communities that were very distinct from Indian communities.

When she moves her attention to contemporary identity, Valaskakis switches to the term "Native," which presumably covers both Indian and Métis, but throughout her discussion of Native women's empowerment, the assumption is that a return to "Indian" tradition is the ideal. She tells us, thus, that "laced through the heritage of repressive policies and devalued practices that Native women live, there is an enduring sense of cultural continuity and Indian community, however transformed and conflictual." Strength is presumed to derive from the Indian, to be deployed against the repression of the European. Native men and women are united by their experience of being made "subalterns, Indians whose roles and responsibilities, culture and customs were eclipsed" (146).

Valaskakis's analysis, which acknowledges the existence of the Métis without really engaging with what they "mean" in terms of Indian/white relations, is typical of Native criticism that focuses on the Indian as though the Métis can be unproblematically drawn into the same arguments on the same footing as their Indian kin. As always, my criticism is not intended to invalidate this critic's work, which is insightful and rigorous in other respects. The conundrum that I am pointing out seems to be unavoidable given the perceived need to validate the Indian at least in part by indicting the European (whom Valaskakis calls the "Indian Other") (250).

Even where an author ostensibly wishes to celebrate the long history of métissage in Canada, as is the case with Proulx-Turner, the problem of negative liminality reappears as an apparently unavoidable stigma for mixedblood people. The poet asserts the longevity of Métis roots, which she says go back through "three hundred years of two bloods" and extend back from Red River to New France, since "those weren't no white men" (15) who migrated from the east. Yet in spite of this long view of métissage, which might suggest that it was actually a "normal" practice that was accepted by both sides in the fur trade, Proulx-Turner cannot get away from the mantra that the métis children were always, and in all places, "shamed on both sides" (19). So while the poet wishes to celebrate métissage by fashioning a strong and clever ancestor in the figure of the Indigenous "old lady" and her creation, the "little red hen," as the female progenitor of the Métis, she also repeatedly undermines the process of ethnogenesis by incorporating a strain of the genocide discourse according to which neither "side" really accepted the Métis at any time in their long history.

Proulx-Turner clearly wishes to use the flexibility of poetic form both to situate the Métis historically and to broaden that historical definition in order to accommodate all manner of Métis experience. She describes the Métis as adopting all types of practices and beliefs:

> some learn traditional ways and pray to the great spirit
> some go to church and pray to god
> some turn their backs on prayer
> some jig it's true some fiddle too some like poetry some like
> to party hard (15)

She explicitly includes the Anglo-Métis by describing the Métis language as "the michif cradle tongue / verbs are cree ojibwe nouns french english" (15). Still, this picture of apparent inclusiveness contains a value judgment about First Nations and European religious practice in particular, in that the former is characterized as "traditional," while the latter is not, making it "new" and alien by implication. This presentation of the two belief systems as mutually exclusive and inherently hierarchized does not appear to reflect the worldview of the original Métis, for whom Christian and Aboriginal prayer could be considered equally "traditional."

The failure to historicize Métis experience accurately leads to a certain amount of anachronism and even historical inaccuracy that undermines the poet's message that the true value of the Métis lies in their ethnoracial duality, which she characterizes as their having "two bloods not half and half like cream" (13). This phrase is meant to refute the notion that mixedblood people "lack" a normative fullness of identity: instead, they presumably have an "overfull" identity that offers a multitude of options and possibilities not open to the single-blooded person. Still, says Proulx-Turner, the Métis nation is birthed from "an unfamiliar egg" into "a world where your children are not welcome on either side / the native or the non-native" and thus faces "to one side to the other a fence they didn't build" (15). Yet in the unique middle ground that formed the historical context for métissage in Western Canada, it is not clear that such "fences" were already in place or that mixed-blood children started out "shamed on both sides" (19), a condition that the poet assumes to be an original and enduring condition of Métis reality.

The auntys' declaration that "now is our time / our time to remember our time to heal" (13) offers an important clue as to why Proulx-Turner seems to portray so negatively the supposedly creative process of Métis ethnogenesis: like most Native authors writing today, she is adopting the assumptions of genocide discourse, according to which the world was indeed unwelcoming to mixedblood children from the very beginning. There is no "middle ground" in this ideology: it assumes an unchanging, hostile white/Indian binary that the Métis must constantly contend with, but can never alter. Ironically, then, this Métis creation story is tinged with the sense of melancholy that signals its place in Native literature, a literature that at least one critic believes is "by definition the literature of survivors of genocide" (Eigenbrod 71).

Genocide Discourse and Métissage

The Indigenous feminist view of contact and métissage comprises a twofold argument that denigrates métissage and depicts it as responsible, ultimately, for the fatal weakening of the First Nations. In this version of contact history, Indigenous women were betrayed by their own fathers, who used them as trade goods in their dealings with European men, and by their European husbands, who used their Indian and Métis wives to serve their own needs and then abandoned them for white women. The second part of the feminist argument is that, as the centre and anchor of traditional cultures, Aboriginal women are the only ones who can restore the strength and integrity of their people after centuries of debilitation at the hands of white colonizers.

Monique Mojica's play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991), and Louise Halfe's volume of poetry, *Blue Marrow* (1998), illustrate this double process of blaming men and detailing the victimization of Indigenous women. These are texts written by non-Métis authors who use Métis characters or scenes of métissage to illustrate the negative consequences of contact on Indian women. Included as a comparative element, these representations help illustrate the influences within Native literature that inflect Métis writing, especially by women authors, towards a negative instead of a positive portrayal of historical métissage.

The purpose of both Mojica and Halfe is to imaginatively restore strength to Aboriginal women by lending them a newfound self-awareness and giving their contemporary characters the ability to tap into the power of female ancestors. That is, in a fundamentally feminist move, the ancestors are transformed from victims into sources of power by being given a voice in literature through which they bear witness to their own painful experiences and help "heal" their daughters. Both of these texts demonstrate how the history of métissage, when told in the light of today's attitudes and political purposes, becomes a nightmare of victimization for women. Furthermore, this is a nightmare that continues to have repercussions through the generations because métissage involves physical reproduction, and because by its very nature, cultural genocide causes ongoing trauma that is transmitted laterally within families and communities, and intergenerationally.

In Mojica's play, a feminist synopsis of the history of Indigenous women throughout North America, the characters Marie, Margaret, and Madelaine represent "Three faces out of the hordes of Cree and Métis women who portaged across Canada with white men on their backs and were then systematically discarded" (15). Marie, who seems to be speaking from a First Nations subject position, tells us that she was "sent" by her father to work for white traders because "They had no one to make moccasins, to cook for them to show them where to pick berries, to make canoes" (41). Echoing the role of women in the fur trade as revealed by Van Kirk (whose work Mojica acknowledges as a source (61), Marie explains that

> We women, we make moccasins

string snowshoes
teach them to walk in the snow
make canoes. We, hunt
fish
put food away for the winter
teach them to survive. (43)

According to this presentation, Indigenous women are treated like beasts of burden and a form of chattel transferred between men, from father to husband. The woman's only expression is one of complaint and of resigned pride in her knowledge and physical abilities.

To characterize women's roles in contemporary feminist terms, "Contemporary Woman #1" steps in to broaden their ideological impact, telling us that in fact, Indigenous women "translate / navigate / build alliances with our bodies / loyalties through our blood" (43). Marie adds, to confirm the significance of the last two phrases: "We birth the Métis" (43). Even more important than women's work and knowledge, then, is their reproductive ability, which creates the kinship alliances on which Aboriginal trade relies and to create "loyalties" through mixedblood children who presumably feel equally loyal to both their mothers and their fathers (to echo Louis Riel's well-known phrase).

Margaret's story is rather more dismal. The childless third wife of a "captain of the home guard" (44), meaning the "home guard Cree" who lived near, hunted for, and depended on Hudson's Bay Company forts, Margaret is traded by her husband for provisions: "My husband didn't have a good hunt this season, so he brought me into the fort; and he left with flour, sugar and brandy" (45). Continued close relations between traders and Indigenous people seems to weaken women's positions even further: no longer is it a matter of a father giving his daughter in marriage in order to help a trading partner and bind him closer to the group through kinship. Now, it is a husband trading his wife like chattel in return for trade goods. The inevitable result of contact, Mojica tells us, is the commodification of women as patriarchal attitudes take hold throughout Indian country. This commodification is accompanied by alienation from Indigenous culture as Margaret is made acceptable to "the company men" (45). The process is one of physical and ideological assault. Washed in harsh lye soap, her protective bear grease removed, and dressed in a cloth dress instead of deerskin, Margaret undergoes the ultimate alienation by having her name – Wapithee'oo – discarded, so that she is stripped of her true self both inside and out.

In the fort, Margaret melds into a "we" of Indigenous women who "scrub the forts and warm their beds... and their beds... and their beds..." (45). The true nature of the trade is revealed to be the prostitution of Indigenous women, who "quickly learn to love their alcohol" (45) as a means of coping with the degradation to which they have been consigned, since it "numbs not recognizing the face of one company man from the next." Abandoned by their families, traded away by their "Fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands" for "knives, axes, muskets liquor" (46), enslaved and subjected to serial rape, these women are reduced to a position of complete abjection in which their choices are submission or death. Their families having apparently abandoned them to their lot, they must "Claw at the gate of the fort or we starve and freeze to death outside" (46). Out of this situation, despite their dying of "smallpox, syphilis, tuberculosis, childbirth," Mojica repeats, these women "birth the Métis" (46).

According to this presentation of the origins of the Métis, then, they arise initially out of an ethos of mutual assistance and alliance-building between Indigenous peoples and European traders, although the women in question have no say in their own roles in the process, in which they are expected to cement the alliances through their marriages with white men. Soon, however, it is no longer even a question of marriage: having become dependent on European trade goods, Indigenous men are willing to trade away their women. No longer are these women presented as knowledgeable and self-sufficient: in their newly subservient position in a homosocial system, they have been reduced to a state of brute labour and sexuality. Birthing the Métis is now a side effect of rape, virtually equated with the contagious and venereal diseases that result from contact.

This figure of the Métis woman coincides with the view of colonial hybridity that, in Robert Young's view, underpins attitudes toward mixed race. Young concludes that

> the forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both mirrors and consequences of the modes of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations; the extended exchange of property which began with small trading-posts and the visiting of slave ships originated, indeed, as much in exchange of bodies as of goods, or rather the bodies as goods. (181)

The trade in women that Mojica assumes was part of the fur trade lies on a continuum with the slave trade, the common denominator being the willingness of the trading partners to treat women as disposable goods. The problem with this interpretation of history and the assumptions it entails is that they give no consideration to the question of volition: slaves were not handed over by their own kin, but were captives bought and sold by professional slave traders. The transaction entails no value judgments about the culture of the slaves, except that like every culture, it had points of weakness that left its people vulnerable to capture. Applying this model to the fur trade requires that we believe that the Indigenous peoples involved would willingly victimize their own women for the sake of food and alcohol, and in order to appease the appetites of their white trading partners, and would let them die of starvation sooner than take them back into the community.

Acknowledging that not all relationships between Indigenous women and white men involved crass prostitution, Mojica presents a third "face" of the female ancestor, this one represented by Madelaine, whose marriage of fifteen years ends when her position is usurped by a "British woman" (47). Her husband explains to her that she has been "turned off" (the process described by Van Kirk whereby a trader would arrange to have a colleague take over responsibility for his partner when he returned to Québec or Europe at the end of his service in the fur trade, or before taking a new wife (*"Many Tender Ties"* 162) and the new couple callously inform her she has "two days to get out" (46). Having built the social foundations of the fur trade and having committed their most intimate selves – their physical and life-bearing selves – to the cause of building "loyalties" by birthing the Métis, these women are betrayed by the white men they have served so faithfully. The stories of Marie, Margaret, and Madelaine recapitulate the stories of Jane and Margaret Taylor in the métissage narrative laid out by Christine Welsh in *Women in the Shadows*. In *Princess Pocahontas*, the voice of Contemporary Woman #1 again intervenes to explain the implications of Madelaine's treatment: "when the White women came," she says, "these [Indian and Métis] women, who were the wives and daughters and granddaughters of the founders of this country – were no longer women" (47). Mojica thus suggests that the consequence of this treatment is to deny Indigenous women their very gender, presumably because their roles have been so closely tied to their sexuality and child-bearing abilities, neither of which are valued any longer in this scenario.

The end of this scene, one of thirteen empowering "transformations" of Indigenous women that make up the play, symbolizes a reciprocal rejection of métissage by the Métis woman. Contemporary Woman #1, who has been dressed in a European-style shawl, kerchief and calico dress, sheds these articles of clothing to leave only a "buckskin yoke" (48). The symbolic return to (pre-contact) indigeneity by removing signs of Europeanness (or at least those that can be removed) represents an explicit performance of the sort of indigenizing of the Métis woman that I examined in *Halfbreed*: having rejected the Métis woman, the white male has presumably rejected his own role in métissage, and racial mixing henceforth loses value for both sides.

Mojica does not broach the questions of what might be the status of the Métis, given that they are depicted as originating in the commodification and abjection of their mothers, or of what their fate will be as their maternal ancestor gains a sense of agency and removes herself from the alienating clothing (and mindset) that have distanced her from her "true" Indigenous self. According to this presentation of historical métissage, it is corrupt virtually from the outset and is driven by men for the benefit of men. Yet the playwright's indictment of Indigenous women's subjection casts doubt over the entire Métis nation as somehow tainted by the defilement that characterized its origins.

Mojica's cursory polemical presentation of the historical context of métissage is intended to indict North American colonial contact in all of its guises. The play is meant to gives a voice back to the silent Indigenous woman of history, a figure who, Mojica would agree, "only becomes a productive agent through an act of colonial violation" (Young 19). Yet the woman's "transformation" involves a simplistic repudiation of Europeanization, which assumes that métissage can (and should) be reversed and raises questions about the position and value of her mixed-race descendants. Louise Halfe's volume of poetry, *Blue Marrow*, covers much of the same historical material, but does so with a great deal more nuance and takes into account the fact that centuries of métissage cannot be undone with one symbolic gesture.

Halfe's poem cycle is presented as the product of a contemporary Indigenous narrator who writes mainly in English but also uses Cree to address her ancestors. (Some of these Cree words and phrases are repeated in English to enable comprehension by a non-Cree-speaking audience.) This language use indicates an ethnoracial identity that is complicated by the narrator's references to Métis or mixedblood relations, making this woman a sort of Cree counterpart to Maria Campbell, someone who is invoking her aboriginal ancestors to help her understand her situation and give her strength to cope with the challenges faced by an Indian woman and reclaim an Indigenous heritage she has nearly lost.

The narrator's *nohkomak* (grandmothers) respond with the promise that "*We will guide your feather / dipped in ink*" (27; italics in the original indicate the voices of the grandmothers speaking). These female ancestors thus take up the role of muses and guides and act as the source of historical knowledge to which the narrator does not have direct access. The text becomes a dialogue between present and past as the narrator attempts to understand the present through the experiences of her ancestors. At first, the scene that gives rise to originary métissage appears to be presented in a more favourable light than in Mojica's text. Although it still has the appearance of a sort of trade, this transaction takes place on more egalitarian grounds, indicating that it fits within the more balanced and respectful atmosphere of the middle ground and is consistent with First Nations customs. The young bride describes how, as she sits with her husband-to-be,

> On each side my mother and father sat.
> Blankets tea sugar flour gunpowder.
> Tobacco ribbons blueberry cloth. (17)

Reading this scene as nothing but a commercial transaction would be a Eurocentric misreading of the situation. Here, the woman tells how "my love and I" hold hands during the ceremony, indicating that she has agreed to the marriage. The goods on offer are the culturally appropriate means by which the suitor pays his respects to her parents and seeks their permission to take her as his wife. The woman's mother (who is markedly absent from Mojica's presentation) is part of the ceremony, indicating that the process is endorsed by all those whose interests are at stake, including those of the women. At this point, in any case, the process that will give rise to racial métissage is presented as one of mutual comprehension in which all parties are acting in their own best interests, the white trader adopting Indigenous behaviour to obtain the wife (and presumably the trading relationship) he desires, while the parents ascertain that he is a good provider and someone with whom they wish to create kinship ties.

In the scene above, the Indigenous woman seems to have greater agency and a deeper subjectivity as part of the mixed-race couple than is the case in Mojica's portrait. Later in the poem, however, we hear echoes of the commodification of another woman, who says that

> *My father saw*
> *my future husband –*
> *mounds of fur,*
> *flour, tea and sugar,*
> *kettles, knives and guns* (50)

and concludes that "*I became the trade*" (51). Nevertheless, she tells us that her father believes that he is doing the right thing, because marrying his daughter to this trader would ensure his people's survival: "*He saw / deer-skinned children / laughing*." The woman "*bec[omes] the beaded belts of my father's dream*" (51), the one whose marriage will guarantee a future that will in turn become the history of the people, recorded on wampum belts.

Halfe tells us, however, that the marriage transaction was never really based on a meeting of the minds, since her husband regards the transaction differently: "*How many times as I lay beneath him*," says the Indigenous wife, "*did he remind me / I am the* *bargain from my father's trade?*" (52). Like the women in *Women in the Shadows* and *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, this young woman too is betrayed by her husband the "*gentleman*" (52) who takes a white bride, "*his cousin frances*" (53), thus revealing that this character is Margaret Taylor, since the reference is to George Simpson's white wife, whose name was Frances. Given that Taylor actually had a white father (Welsh, "Voices" 21), this woman's Indian "father" may be understood as an adoptive stepfather or, in terms of Halfe's overall approach, as a general compression of Indigenous fathers and their daughters. Nonetheless, this rewriting of the reality of a historical woman shows that Halfe is more concerned with presenting historical métissage as an eternal question of Indian/white relations than she is with examining the complexities of Métis life and ideology as part of that historical process.

Even a woman who does desire the white man she marries merely experiences another form of betrayal: instead of being traded away by her parents or prostituted by an Aboriginal husband, she is betrayed by her own loving nature, which binds her to a man who has no reciprocal sense of fidelity. The grandmothers describe themselves as the sort of victim figures that Mojica also evoked:

In those days
we lay heavy
loaded with children, grub,
The men added to our
burden, whipped us
as if we were dogs,

> *horses ploughing*. (27)

Treated like animals, giving birth to children whom they can only see as another kind of burden, these women return in spirit to tell a harrowing story that, like the history in *Princess Pocahontas*, covers the whole of contact history. The Spanish conquest is associated with the most shocking violence, as the ancestors recount how "*They* [the Spaniards] *tore flesh, breasts became pouches, hung / from their belts*" and "*Shot our children as they gathered wood. / Tore babies, crushed their skulls against the rocks*" (19). Catholic missionaries arrive close on their heels as "*The great mother sends more gods / to sprinkle water / on our heads*" (19), an ironic reference to Queen Isabella and Native belief that the white men may be gods (Todorov, *Conquest* 95-96), but "gods" whose mystifying rites are clearly ineffectual in saving the people from further atrocities. The compression of violence and Christian evangelization into a single stanza makes a potent statement about the hypocritical implication of the Catholic Church in the violence of conquest and colonialism.

Halfe then compresses space and time by jumping from the late fifteenth century to the late nineteenth century, when "*The buffalo are a mountain of bones*" (referring to the mass slaughter of the buffalo for the fertilizer industry that was partly responsible for the disappearance of the buffalo from the prairie) and when the woman says that "*My son is shot for killing their cow*" (19), an allusion to Almighty Voice (Kamantowiwew), the Cree-Saulteaux man who was jailed in 1895 for killing a government-owned steer ("Kitchi-manitou-waya"; Wiebe "Where?").

At the end of this sequence of compressed contact history, the Indigenous woman comes to the horrifying realization that "I become a squaw with blood on my hands" (19), a self-accusation that acknowledges both the agency of Indigenous women in choosing to go with white men and, consequently, their role in helping the men who have devastated their people. The ancestral woman (also a figure of the earth mother) says that

> *I don't regret those days, my belly*
> *swollen with winter feed.*
> *Spring will rise, milk will flow,*
> *a hundred babies rippling*
> *my thighs.*
> *I'd have him again.*
> *I'd have him again.* (25)

For a time, while there are many buffalo, the relationship seems to be working and the woman feels that she has made the right choice. But when the hunt fails, she discovers that marrying the white man does not actually enable her to help her people. Instead, she says, "we / barricaded them" (30) to keep them out when they are starving. The status of that "we" is problematic: Halfe is evoking the period of the 1870s, when the buffalo disappeared from the plains and the buffalo hunt failed, a period when endogamous métissage was the norm. Given that context, one might suppose that the Native female speaker has become a Métis wife who becomes aware that she is now part of a "we" that does not include her Indian kin. Yet Halfe continues to write in terms of the originary couple, the Indian women and the white man, as though this remained the norm throughout the course of history on the Prairies. This assumption allows for the female figure in the poem to retain a loyalty primarily to her Indian relations:

> It was not the only time
> I hated the man
> whose white flesh
> shared my bed.
> My memory snared
> by my people, beggars in the land
> that once filled their bellies. (30)

Throughout her historical montage of Indigenous women's attitudes toward contact, then, Halfe insists that no matter what the period, it is Indigenous women married to (or seduced by or raped by) white men who constitute the archetypal characters in the story. There is never a point, that is, where a period of endogamous métissage begins, or where the culturally Métis couple replaces the Indian/white couple.

This temporal compression presents the whole of contact history as a series of interlinked traumatic episodes. The ancestral women are the mothers of all Aboriginal people, grieving over the many forms of physical and cultural trauma to which their people have been subjected, including the loss of their language and sacred rituals (17) and physical and sexual abuse. On an individual level, the experiences that Halfe recreates for her female ancestors might today come under the classic definition of traumatic events as experiences that fall "outside the range of human experience" (L. Brown 119). Even practices such as "turning off" wives, which might be considered a standard practice by fur trade historians, could be deemed a source of "insidious trauma," which feminist psychologist Laura Brown defines as "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment, but which do violence to the soul and spirit" (128). In Indigenous terms, this definition is reminiscent of the "soul wound" posited by Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, a term that is meant to encapsulate the compounded results of colonial domination that separated Indigenous people from the foundational power of their cultures, including the power of family and kinship systems, which were systematically dismantled through government policies (24-27). Clearly, writers such as Halfe and Mojica are attempting to portray the history of Indigenous women in terms of insidious trauma or a soul wound. Nevertheless, it is possible that they are projecting their own viewpoints anachronistically onto women who did not see their lives in the same way. The purpose these contemporary authors have in mind is to give strength to their sisters, as is indicated by Halfe's invocation to the grandmothers:

> *Pē-nihtacowēk, Nōhkomak.*
> Climb down, my Grandmothers.
>
> *Pē-nanāpacihinān.*
> Come heal us.
>
> *Ē-sōkēpayik. Ki-maskihkēm.*
> Your energy so powerful.

Kā-wi-nanāpacihikoyahk.

We need for our healing.

Pē-nihtacowēk, Nōhkomak.

Climb down, my Grandmothers.

Kitimākinawinān. Sawiminān.

In your gentleness pity us. (16)

At the end of the volume, the poet wonders,

> Did our Grandmothers know we would be scarred by the fists and boots of men? Our songs taxed, silenced by tongues that speak damnation and burning? Did they know we would turn woman against woman? Did they know some of us would follow, take mates of colour and how the boarding of our worlds would pulse breathing exiles connected to their womb? [...] Did they know of our struggling hearts? (89)

In the very last line, the speaker closes the invocation from the beginning with the statement that "Grandmother [is now] the Woman in Me" (90). In this way, the contemporary Indian woman incorporates in herself the whole history of her people, and especially of her fellow women.

Beyond the experience of individual women, then, the sort of trauma that Halfe evokes is structural trauma at the level of Indigenous cultures: even where no evidence can be found of outright racial genocide, the argument that colonialism in general and government policy in particular was aimed at destroying Indigenous people at the level of their cultures (and thus of their identities *as* members of given Indigenous groups) is generally accepted today. Native feminists insist that since women are responsible for the physical reproduction of the group and for the care and transmission of its culture, undermining women is an especially devastating way of undermining the people. Halfe's women describe themselves as being on the front line in trying to deal with the sexual abuse of their children by "spiritual" white men: "We / were the ones, *Nōsisim*, who hid the Bundles, / held council when we learned how those brothers / lifted their skirts to spill their devils into our sons' night" (32).

On a psychic level, anxiety about violation can itself become a force of social control when a fear of violation in Indigenous women and children and a sense of powerlessness in the Indigenous men who are unable to protect them from harm prevent the community from functioning normally. These fears lead to paralysis and demoralization that cause insidious trauma in both individuals and communities. It is this level of generalized, inter-generational trauma that Halfe conveys. Current levels of community breakdown are explained by portraying them as the end point of a five-hundred-year history of sustained, multifaceted violence and the lasting psychic damage it causes.

In a recent poem, "If we are pictured too easily," Marilyn Dumont draws a direct connection between fur trade history and contemporary violence against Native women:

> [...] our denigration

started long ago
a tradition of gentlemen
explorers, fur traders, company men
investing little more than the fickle heart of commerce
in our company

so that, now, when a twelve year old Indian girl is raped in Saskatchewan
or when an Indian woman is set on fire in Edmonton
or when many Indian women disappear on a pig farm in Port Coquitlam

our skin too, crawls from their violation
and we breathe an air heavy with death song
while our grandmothers rattle the doors of justice (*This Tongued* 4-5)

Here, there is no longer even a question of the women's fathers being complicit in the transaction: the background of historical violence is one of a contact zone in which white men are the violators, Indian women the victims. The "gentlemen," or HBC officers, whom Van Kirk first identified as the source of racism in Western Canada, have come to represent all white men who were the "fathers" of the Métis.

Although Halfe and Dumont clearly call for a reading of the historical ground of métissage as trauma, such a reading is not as straightforward as is interpreting the Holocaust or slavery as trauma (two of the historical subjects that most often figure in such literary critical interpretations). A consensus on the ethical status of métissage in

Western Canada is not so easily reached as in those other cases, which cannot be justified or "explained" without doing further harm to their victims. In the case of métissage, however, one must presumably take into account the impact on Métis people themselves of characterizing their maternal ancestors as "squaws with blood on their hands" and their paternal ancestors as rapists or, at the very best, indifferent or absent fathers. Without wishing to strain the comparison between the Holocaust and métissage, it is possible to see the parallel between assimilated Jews who are censured for supposedly doing the work of Hitler by failing to maintain Jewish culture (Michaels 13) and Métis who might feel a need to avoid the perception that they are doing the (assimilative) work of the colonizer by identifying too closely with their European heritage.

It is a similar accusation against La Malinche – the Indigenous woman as either (acquiescent) victim or traitor – that Gloria Anzaldúa works on with respect to the ancestors of the Mexican mestizos/as. While her solution is by no means easily reached or unequivocal, she does find a way to reframe La Malinche's actions in terms of survival and empowerment, to "radically deconstruct and reconstruct the perception of Mestiza- or Métis-ness, not as deficient state but rather as an asset, understanding the Halfbreed's ability to access different cultures and world views not as a restricting capacity, but as an enlightening and liberating one" (Lutz et al. 300). As Mojica's Malinche puts it, "anything that is alive here [in Mexico] is alive because I stayed alive!" (25).

Accepting the discourse of cultural genocide as the proper framework in which to see all of Aboriginal history, including the history of métissage, must inevitably lead to the implication that the Métis may have been, historically at least, implicated in the subjugation of their Indian relations. Hence the need for the Métis, in the midst of their own cultural revival, to emphasize not only the power of Métis culture to endure but also its indigeneity. Given the rich cultural repertoire of the Métis, this is a matter of choosing and emphasizing those elements that meet the group's current political and ideological needs. Nonetheless, accepting genocide discourse as the proper frame within which to interpret Métis origins means accepting that those origins are, in a sense, compromised and shameful rather than part of a unique and valuable process that might show the way toward future relations in a middle-ground ethos, that is, relations based on mutual accommodation despite a lack of complete mutual understanding.

Portraying historical métissage as trauma (rape and violence) either as the deemed "truth" of women's real experiences in the past or as a metaphor for the treatment of Native people by white colonizers in general may be considered a form of strategic essentialism intended to strengthen the political position of First Nations people. Yet when it is taken as a true essence rather than a strategic essence, it may have the perverse effect of undermining Métis pride. The recuperation of the Métis past and the celebration of Métis ethnicity in Canadian society as a whole is not yet being reflected in literature, where the darker sides of Métis and First Nations history lie like a shadow across the celebration. A sense of loss seems to have become an inevitable part of the literary treatment of Métis themes.

The texts that I have examined in this chapter link that sense of historical loss to the present in the form of a persistent sadness, as age-old trauma is worked through in literary form. These texts nevertheless show that there is no consensus about the source and meaning of that loss and trauma: for some, contact itself was the source of harm to aboriginal peoples in North America, leading to a history of ongoing injury whose repercussions are still being felt today. For others (mainly historians), the early history of métissage contained the promise of peaceful and mutually beneficial contact, the richness and productivity of transculturation, and a liberating atmosphere of flexibility of personal identity and affiliations between communities. Indeed, all of those utopian ideals that sometimes attach to hybridity in current postcolonial discourse can be seen in Red River and in Métis country in the nineteenth century, at the very time when European racial theory assumed that interracial discord was the norm in human societies. In spite of the difficult subsequent experiences of the Métis, many contemporary Métis intellectuals continue to look to that promise as a source of healing, the proof that hardened racial categories and mutual distrust or repulsion are not inevitable. Even texts that celebrate Métis heritage or the power of the Métis worldview cannot avoid the sense of nostalgia for that golden age and of mourning for the fact that Métis (racial, ethnic, social and linguistic) liminality could be turned so devastatingly from a strength before 1885 to a weakness after that date.

The growing power of genocide discourse helps explain why contemporary representations of the Métis assert that they can best renew themselves (and perhaps redeem themselves for their part in métissage) by reaffirming their ties with their Indigenous ancestors. By re-indigenizing themselves – choosing Cree over French (or even one of the various forms of Michif), say, or Native spirituality over Christianity – the Métis can regain an integrity that they have lost either by acquiescing to the forces of assimilation or by, quite simply, incorporating too fully (physically or culturally) the "whiteness" of their European ancestors. That is essentially the message in Mohawk poet Beth Brant's assertion that mixedblood people who return to their Native roots are "coming home" (205), or LaRocque's avowal that she bears "the scars" of her "Exile" ("Brown Sister") . Métis literature too expresses the desire to go "home," or return from exile, by disavowing and reversing métissage as a way of redeeming mixedblood people from their implication in genocide through miscegenation.

CONCLUSION

Whether as a "new nation" in the nineteenth century or a distinct ethnoracial group in the twentieth century and beyond, the Métis of Western Canada have always defined themselves in terms of their mixed ancestral heritage. That is, after all, the underlying meaning of Riel's famous phrase that to be true to who they are, the Métis must honour their mothers and their fathers. Renan's analysis of the foundations of nationhood still applies: neither language, religion, nor even territory is the ultimate guarantee of continuity. Only memory, the intergenerational links that remain between the people and their ancestors, has the power to bind people together into a collective identity. As Renan puts it, "Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes" (34).

The problem is that the Métis have two sorts of ancestors: there are the already-existing Métis of the nineteenth century, the people who first called themselves "Métis," the people who fought at Red River and Batoche, and whose great leader was martyred for their cause. Those people and their actions exert a powerful force for identification since, as Renan tells us, "En fait de souvenirs nationaux, les deuils valent mieux que les triomphes, car ils imposent des devoirs, ils commandent l'effort en commun" (34). The Métis renewal now under way, based on the celebration of Métis history and traditions, practices and stories, depends on links with those ancestors.

Behind those already-Métis ancestors, however, always lie the Indian women and white men who give the Métis the biracial ancestry that their name bespeaks. This set of ancestors is decidedly more problematic for contemporary Métis identity, because of the change in values attached to those racial heritages. The pendulum of values attached to race has swung back and forth over the years. In the conditions of the middle ground, interracial marriages and their mixed-race offspring were the norm: far from being born into a world of "hatred on both sides," the first métis were apparently born into a world of acceptance on both sides. Only later, with the growth of Anglo-Canadian dominance in the west, did the pendulum gradually swing in favour of whiteness, creating pressures for Métis people to identify as Euro-Canadians and the stigmatizing of Indian-identified Métis. The writings of Euro-Canadian authors in the early and mid-twentieth century reflect the complexity of these ideological pressures, which are exerted not only within an Indian-white binary context but, on the white side, within a French-English context as well.

With another swing of the pendulum in the late twentieth century, the value of the races has been reversed, so that Indianness is now embraced, and whiteness rejected or downplayed. As a result, the discursive treatment of originary métissage has undergone a sea change. For Métis and First Nations women writers, the "birthing of the Métis nation," which was the work of Indian women, was not nearly so positive or self-evident. When judged in terms of genocide rather than ethnogenesis, white-Indian contact in the fur trade becomes a scene of trauma perpetrated by men (both white and Indian) against Indian women, who were traded away and prostituted, treated as slave labour, betrayed, and separated from their families and cultures. That they have survived and now sustain their Aboriginal roots is an achievement they attribute to matriarchal powers previously unrecognized by their own people, who were blinded and corrupted by the patriarchal forces of colonialism.

Riel's call for the Métis to respect both of their ancestries no longer has the purchase it once did, when the very origins of métissage are depicted as sordid and disempowering for women. The problem this reinterpretation of history raises, however, is that it strikes at the very roots of existence of the Métis. How can one celebrate a heritage that is derived from the subjection and degradation of women? When the "chosen trauma" (Roshwald 88) of the Métis was the defeat at Batoche and the execution of Riel, the existence of the Métis before 1885 could be figured as a golden age of growth and freedom; when the perspective shifts and contact itself is seen as traumatic, then métissage becomes an aberration. The implication, then, is that the Métis can redeem themselves by abjuring their white "fathers" as agents of genocide and embracing their Indian "mothers" as the most authentic and uncompromised part of themselves.

The rhetoric of contact-as-trauma, or genocide discourse, gains power by projecting back across all of contact history the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century, and by gathering in the histories of contact throughout the Americas and bundling them into a single history with a single meaning. According to this rhetoric, there is no distinguishing between a "middle ground" and a "contact zone," between egalitarian contact and contact in conditions of unequal power. In hindsight, all contact is seen as corrupt from the outset.

While Riel seems to point to respect and kinship as core elements of Métisness, his phrase opens out into the connected racial and gender aspects of contact: the "father" represents the European side of the Métis, while the "mother" figure represents the Indian side. Unfortunately, an abiding fascination with the racial duality of the Métis, as manifested in this configuration, has eclipsed the importance of endogamous métissage as constitutive of a Métis community practising a new culture made up of disparate threads from different heritage groups. The very naturalness of being Métis in Western Canada – the feeling of a people who "know who they are" – is often lost in literary representations (as well as literary critical approaches) that revolve around forcing Métis characters into race-based and hierarchical binaries that make it impossible to reflect an even-handed respect for their dual heritage.

The re-indigenizing of the Métis has been endorsed and furthered by the tendency in Native criticism to construe "Native," or all the more so "First Nations," as categories that include the Métis. Granted, Métis critics such as Jodi Lundgren and Emma LaRocque hold that there is a distinction to be made in discussing Métis texts. LaRocque objects to Acoose's insistence on Native unity because, she contends, it contributes to the "collectivization" ("Native Writers" 298) of Native people that erases their Native individuality and cultural differences between Native groups, thus preventing the dismantling of monolithic views of "the Indian," not to mention the nature of Métis identity and culture as containing more than Indianness alone. Nevertheless, the widespread assumption that the historical and cultural contextualization of "First Nations literature" (Hulan and Warley 59) can be straightforwardly applied to Métis literature as well gives rise to the sort of misleading and contradictory views of the Métis that all literary critics would presumably prefer to avoid and dispel. Hulan explains elsewhere that "I use the term Native in the sense of pan-Native throughout this article because it is the term generally used in Canadian literary studies to refer to literature by people who describe themselves as First Nations, Indian, Métis, Aboriginal or indigenous" (89, n. 1), thereby negating the sort of "sophisticated approach" through historical and cultural literacy that she advocates for teachers and students of Native literature (Hulan and Warley 59). Not only does the presumption that there exists a single "Native culture" erase the cultural distinctions between, say, Mi'kmaq, Haida, Cree, Ojibway, and Mohawk cultures, but to an even greater extent it distorts the history and culture of the Métis as a group by implicitly holding that the Métis can be properly and adequately understood solely within an Indian or First Nations context.

Two white-authored texts from the late twentieth century illustrate the ways in which these presumptions can affect the representation of the Métis in Euro-Canadian narratives. The novel *Tchipayuk, ou le chemin du loup*, a novel by Franco-Manitoban author Ronald Lavallée, features a Métis hero who has been interpreted as a double of Louis Riel (Joubert). Like Riel, Askik Mercredi is born in Red River and is sent to Québec to be educated before finally returning to the west to work with his own people. In an important section of the novel, however, Lavallée has the boy's father leave him with an Ojibway band for several months while the man is away on a trading trip. In this way, Lavallée imaginatively "indigenizes" his Riel figure through the Ojibway education he receives from the woman elder with whom he lives, suggesting that the "Indian" credentials of the historical Riel were too weak to meet contemporary expectations.

In a more disturbing example of how purportedly "pro-Native" historical revisionism can result in a toxic representation of métissage, Alberta author Nancy Huston in her novel *Plainsong* portrays Métis people as the product of rape through the complicity of white fur trade officers and Catholic priests. Significantly, the character who acts as a Native informant in Huston's novel is described as a mixedblood woman who is the product of her Sarcee mother's rape by a white man. She in turn passes on the "information" from her grandmother that Métis children are the offspring of Indian girls staying at Catholic residential schools who are systematically raped before they leave: "Their education was not complete until a Hudson's Bay Company factor had rent their heathen maidenheads and deposited his civilized seed in their wild wombs" (161). The Métis children born of this violent act are treated in one of two ways: "If the child was a boy his white father would usually acknowledge him and bring him up in view of a future career as a diplomat and interpreter between traders and redskins [...] but if the child was a girl she was left to her fate among the savages" (161). This extremely negative view of Métis historical origins would seem to be an expression of white guilt and self-flagellation gone awry, yet it is not inconsistent with the overall presentation by the First Nations and Métis authors I have discussed who portray métissage as resulting from violence against Indian women by white men.

In contrast to the single-framed notion of métissage (that is, of métissage as a process that is always and everywhere the same), Fred Stenson's novel *The Trade* offers a different way of conceiving of the contact past, one that acknowledges instances of violence but that also portrays métissage as a process of accommodation. Stenson provides a sort of paradigm of motivations for interracial sex and marriage in the fur trade: the love affair between English trader Ted Harriott and his Métis wife Margaret Pruden; the violence and racism in George Simpson's treatment of Margaret Pruden as he pursues her; and the marriage between the English chief factor John Rowand and his Cree wife, Louise. It is this last relationship that represents a startling departure for representing originary métissage, because Stenson finds a way of showing how such a relationship might be based on mutual self-interest.

In Stenson's version, John Rowand goes out riding one day, is thrown from his horse and breaks his leg. Rowand lies there helplessly all day, knowing that he will likely be killed by wolves once night falls. When Louise comes by in a cart, she knows that his life is in her hands, and the two strike an unspoken bargain: "That she would be his woman, but that he would be a better husband than the local custom tended to provide. He would never beat her or their children, nor make them work more than was fair. He would not go after other women no matter how much rum he drank" (326). The marriage between Rowand and Louise is, in fact, the most successful one in the novel. It is also significant that outsiders interpret the relationship according to their own preconceptions, and interpret it wrongly. Rowand's fellow traders assume that Louise occupies the position of a lone Cree woman who is desperate to marry a white man in order to survive; only the couple themselves understand the true dynamic in their relationship, a dynamic in which Louise wields much greater power than (European) outsiders might understand or admit.

Through his portrait of the originary couple, Stenson depicts a relationship that is egalitarian, based on the stabilizing factor of mutual self-interest rather than on love or violence. It is neither romantic nor tragic: it is simply, in its own mysterious way, a supremely *pragmatic* relationship. And it is pragmatism that characterizes the middle ground. This is a situation in which perfect intelligibility is not required to reach agreements and understandings, where cultural conjunctions provide enough of a connection for people from different cultures to live and work together. This is precisely the aspect of métissage that is evoked to dismantle the powerful self/other binary of postcolonial discourse.

If the interpretation of Métis and First Nations texts can be enriched by greater attention to historical and cultural contexts, then it is necessary to ensure that those contexts are delineated with specificity, not in terms of a muddy and presumptive pan-Nativeness, let alone a pan-Indianness, that erases the very distinctions that a term such as "Métis" is meant to contain. While there may be enormous overlaps in the experiences of Métis people and their Native kin in post-1885 Canada in terms of lack of political recognition and sociocultural power, or suffering the impact of generalized racism and sexism, those overlaps should not be construed as permitting the Métis to be contextualized alongside First Nations in terms of the Indian Act, reserves, or residential schools: that is, if there is any benefit to be derived from contextualization, then the aim of scholarship should be to promote ever more specific and accurate contextualization rather than fuzzy and inaccurate generalizations.

By the same token, if, as many Native and non-Native critics now insist, the purpose of studying Native (including Métis) literature is to educate Canadians about Native concerns and lead to a healing of the wounds inflicted under the Canadian colonial regime (Moses and Goldie xvii; Groening 157; McKegney 175-82), then it is necessary to contemplate with greater nuance and sophistication what particular injuries need to be healed with respect to the Métis. In particular, the problematic representation of Métis origins as part and parcel of a history of genocide against Indian peoples raises the question of whether métissage itself is one of the injuries that is being "healed" through its disavowal and gradual metaphorical reversal.

The complexity of the history of métissage and the Métis in Canada makes clear that "the *terms* of mixture, the conditions of mixing" (Nederveen Pieterse 74), have been a landscape of shifting ground for nearly as long as the Métis have existed. Indeed, the complex history of different forms of French and English colonialism exerted in what is now Canada from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries is now reflected in the existence of different Métis communities across the country.[79] That the Métis do still exist seems a minor miracle, given the official policies and social pressures for assimilation exerted on them for over half a century. The fact is that at different times, the existence of the Métis has been of enormous importance not only to themselves but also to the groups around them. The contest of values currently under way suggests that once again the Métis are caught up in a matrix of interests upheld by First Nations and Euro-Canadians in addition to the Métis themselves. All of these groups seem to find Métis narratives fascinating precisely because they encompass and mediate the tensions involved in negotiating the relations between Canada's First Nations and two "founding nations." If so, then there is every reason to expect that Métis literature, and literature about the Métis, with all of the perplexingly mixed messages they send, will continue to occupy a key place in Canadian culture.

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[79] Cornelius Jaenen asserts that "no single model of colonial expansion, no single paradigm of government, and no single framework of societal evolution can adequately characterize or explain New France" or French activity in North America (157). The same can be said of British expansion in North America, where different geo-political concerns and goals led to the adoption of different colonial systems according to the period and the geographical area. Paying attention to the history and context of colonialism also

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requires that attention be paid to the diversity of colonialisms, something that is impossible when assumptions are made about "colonialism" as a monolithic system.

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